Short Stories.

No. 738.] Week ending February 21, 1903. [Price One Penny.

She paused with the glass in one hand and the phial in the other, for suddenly upon the opposite wall she saw the shadow of a man!

(A Dramatic Incident from our Story, "The Wickedness of a Woman." See inside.)

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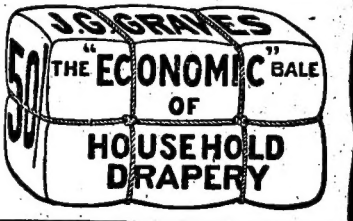

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Short Stories

No. 738.] [ONE PENNY.

Week Ending February 21st, 1903.

The Wickedness of a Woman.

THE STORY OF AN ADVENTURESS.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

"THE señora has decided to go?"

"Yes; I have decided to go."

"The señora is wise—with the wisdom of the serpent. The señora will be a great lady in the land to which she goes."

"It will not be my fault if I am not," and a short laugh, half amused, half scornful, wholly musical, accompanied the words.

The two speakers stood in the tiny living-room of a wretched hovel whose windows looked upon a miserable back street in Valparaiso. No greater contrast could have been conceived than was presented by the women who faced one another in that miserable den. One of them—evidently the mistress of the dwelling—was dressed in the meanest rags, and her dark, evil face bore the stamp of poverty and wickedness.

Her companion obviously belonged to a far higher rank of society, and her face possessed that extraordinary and surpassing beauty, given now and again, though rarely indeed, to one of the daughters of men.

No living being could have looked unmoved upon that exquisite face, with its warm southern colouring, its deep, dark eyes, its lips that could only be compared to pomegranate flowers; its dusky, glorious hair!

Her mien and bearing were those of a queen; her very presence in the den in which she stood seemed incongruous, unnatural. That she should even have a passing acquaintance with the repulsive old hag by her side gave one a sense of repugnance.

The old woman leered up into the beautiful face with her bleared red eyes, and said softly and fawningly:

"The señora must conquer the world. So fair a face should win even a kingdom."

"It will win me all I need," was the short response. "I shall leave this vile land to-morrow."

"To revile the land that gave you birth is——"

"Oh! no moralising please, Marietta," the younger woman broke in impatiently. "I shall revile whom I please, and what I please. This land has been an evil place to me; to-morrow I shake off its dust from my feet for ever!"

"And Gonsalez?" The old woman spoke the words softly but very significantly, and the other started as though a snake had stung her.

"Gonsalez?" she said haughtily, but in spite of herself her voice shook. "I shall never see Gonsalez again. He knows neither where I am going, nor the name under which I go."

Marietta's eyes narrowed into little evil sparks of light, a curious intent look stole over her face.

"The señora goes then under another name? Yet Gonsalez is her——"

"Gonsalez is nothing to me—nothing, nothing!" the other woman cried passionately. "Do not ever remind me that I was a fool to—— But it is all over," she ended, with an abrupt change of tone. "From the moment the ship in which I sail leaves the harbour my past is wiped out; I shall no longer be Elena Huerta, but——"

"But?" the old woman questioned softly, her head eagerly craned forward to catch the reply. But instead of a reply, a low, triumphant laugh came from the younger woman's lovely lips.

"No, no, Marietta!" she cried; "the past you know, the future I shall keep hidden from you. In silence is wisdom, and I can be silent as well as wise."

Disappointed malice looked out of the old woman's eyes, but she said smoothly:

"The señora is right—wisdom and silence go hand in hand. And what can poor old Marietta do for the señora to-day?"

"To-day I am rich; to-morrow I may be poor," the other answered vaguely. "I must have always by me that which can cut the knot of life quickly. You can sell me——"

She hesitated, Marietta's eyes gleamed. She moved across the room to a tumble-down cupboard, from which she drew two tiny bottles. A grim smile overspread her face as she hobbled back to her visitor's side.

"Either of these will suit the purpose of the señora," she said. "With one comes a painless end; with the other——" she shrugged her shoulders with deadly significance. "With both nothing is traceable afterwards!"

"Give me—the painless one," the woman calling herself Elena answered coldly. "I will pay you well."

Ten minutes later there emerged from the low doorway of Marietta's dwelling a tall woman, whose lace mantilla, closely drawn over her face, entirely hindered all recognition of her features. She walked swiftly down the street and entered a carriage that awaited her at a distant corner.

But Marietta, standing alone in her little room, shook her

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fist at the retreating figure, and muttered under her breath:

"Be not so sure that vengeance will not come, my fine señora; a past may be buried, but sometimes it will rise from the dead, as you may find, oh, lady with the soul of a fiend and the face of an angel."

* * *

"My dear fellow, you are not going to marry her!"

"I *am* going to marry her."

"But, Graham, dear old chap, I—well, of course it's no business of mine; I ought not to interfere, but—are you wise to do this without knowing more about—about——"

"Look here, Desmond, I don't want to quarrel with you, but this discussion must end if we are still to be friends. I cannot allow my betrothed to be discussed by anyone, not even by you. Isabella is to me the embodiment of all that is pure and good, as well as beautiful. She——"

"My dear fellow, don't be vexed, but think of the name you will put into her keeping if you marry her; the honoured name that has meant so much to Britain for centuries."

The man called Graham laughed lightly.

"I would trust my honour and my name to her if I were a king!" he answered. "No one could look into her face for a moment, and think evil of her! You are prejudiced against all foreigners, Desmond, that is the plain and simple truth. Don't let us argue the matter any more; you and I are too old friends to quarrel over my marriage," and Lord Graham thrust his arm through Desmond's, and drew him to a table on which rested a large photograph in a silver frame.

"Look at her face and be ashamed of your doubts," he said, half in jest, and half in earnest, and for a moment both men gazed silently at the exquisite features of the portrait. Then Desmond said slowly:

"I grant her loveliness, old man, I never saw a more beautiful woman, but——"

"No more 'buts,'" Graham said lightly; "the wedding is fixed for June 12th." And at that Desmond was silent.

Society is apt, in these days, to fall at the feet of every new divinity that rises above the horizon, but seldom has such a furore been created as was brought about by the introduction to the London world of the famous Spanish beauty, Isabella Guarnera. She took the world by storm. Her marvellous beauty, her grace, her charm, won homage for her wherever she went, and she had not been in London three months before offers of marriage more than she could count, were showered upon her.

But gracious and charming as she was to all who approached her, no one man could flatter himself that he was singled out for her special favour. No one man, that is to say, until Douglas, Earl Graham, that most fastidious of beings, succumbed to her fascinations, and then Isabella melted as no one in her new surroundings had ever seen her melt before.

It was soon perfectly plain that he was singled out for the beautiful woman's favour, and that his persistent wooing was likely to meet with its reward. Perhaps no one was exactly surprised at his infatuation, though plenty of people—his own relations, and his old friend, Hugh Desmond, amongst them—implored him to stop and consider before taking so irrevocable a step as marrying a woman of whom so little was known.

The above conversation was but a sample of many like it. Douglas Graham—hitherto impervious to every woman's charm—Douglas, the most particular, the most refined, as well as one of the noblest of men, was as wildly in love as any schoolboy with the beautiful Spaniard of whose antecedents he knew absolutely nothing but what she herself chose to tell him.

And, needless to say, he placed implicit belief in every word that fell from her lovely lips.

"Tell me, my darling," he said to her one evening, about a week before June 12th, the day fixed for their wedding; "tell me truly—have you never before loved anyone? Am I truly and really the first?"

"Truly and really," she answered, in her deep, musical tones, looking full into his eyes with her own dark ones; "you are the first man I have ever loved—as you will be the last—and only one." And she laid a soft, caressing hand on his.

"But many men must have loved you," he said wistfully.

"If they did," she looked at him with her innocent, angelic smile; "I knew little of it. I gave them no encouragement. I have never cared for men, or for men's society—until now."

And lifting her lovely eyes to his again—the subtle flattery in their depths almost intoxicated him when he saw it, she laid her head upon his breast. The act seemed to him one of beautiful, childlike surrender; his love became something akin to reverent worship, and he said low and humbly:

"God made me worthy of you, my sweet."

* * * * *

Lady Graham—"the beautiful Lady Graham" as she was soon called, was undoubtedly a success. Everyone said so, and of course everyone must be right. Douglas' family forgot their original objection to the marriage, and welcomed her with open arms. Douglas' household adored her; his friends could not speak loudly enough of her many merits.

With one exception. Hugh Desmond, Lord Graham's greatest and oldest friend, never cordially approved of the match or liked his friend's lovely wife.

"That woman is a cat," he said confidentially to his favourite sister when they were discussing the marriage, "don't ask me why I say so, or why I think so, but I know it. She is a cat—a beautiful one, I grant it, but there are claws under that velvet paw—I would swear to that!"

Certainly no claws were visible, and Isabella Graham went on her triumphant way, beloved and admired on all sides.

She made an ideal mistress of her husband's great country house—Dangerfield Hall. She was a Lady Bountiful to the whole village, and the villagers were loud in her praises, and in the admiration of her angelic face.

"Ah! his lordship is a lucky man to 'a' found such a wife as that," they would say. "She be more like to an angel than a woman—so she be!"

Lord and Lady Graham had been married nearly three months, when one fine October afternoon they were returning from paying a visit to a neighbouring Squire. They had dismissed their carriage, and agreed to walk across the Park by Douglas' suggestion.

Isabella never failed to fall in with every suggestion of her husband; it would almost seem as though she could never do enough to please him, and from this fact the generality of people deduced her overwhelming love for Douglas.

Hugh Desmond thought differently. To that safe confidante of his—his sister, he said: "Lady Graham is playing a deep game. She means to yield to Douglas in everything, and play the part of a model wife. That woman is a cat."

* * * * *

No one could have looked less cat-like than did Isabella, as she and her husband strolled across the Park. Her lovely face was alight with animation; she acquiesced with enthusiasm in Douglas' schemes for new cottages, for improved conditions of his tenants, for various philanthropic efforts, and showed such interest in his plans and wishes, that, as they emerged upon the drive, he exclaimed fervently: "No man ever had such a wife as I!"

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She smiled her adorable smile, and they passed on in silence, until, just as they reached their own front door, Douglas exclaimed :

"Good Heavens, there is a man lying on the step ! What on earth is he doing there ?"

Husband and wife hurried forward to find, as Douglas had stated, that a man was lying huddled upon the steps, his ghastly face and closed eyes speaking of serious illness. He was quite unconscious ; only when Lord Graham stooped and touched him gently, he moaned, and cried out wildly in Spanish :

"Elena—I have come—Elena !"

"Poor fellow," Douglas said kindly, "he seems to be a fellow countryman of yours, sweetheart."

He was still bending over the fallen man, otherwise he could not have failed to notice the awful pallor that had overspread his wife's face, the light of deadly hatred that shone out of her flashing eyes, the changed expression of her features, that turned them from those of an angel to those of a demon.

Not the fraction of a second had passed, however, before the expression vanished, and she was her usual sweet self again, saying softly :

"Oh ! poor, poor man, let us have him taken in, Douglas, and do what we can for him."

Graham turned to his wife, passionate adoration written all over his speaking countenance.

"It is like your goodness to have suggested such a thing," he said, "Perhaps the poor fellow had heard of you and of your helpfulness to all who suffer, and came here to ask for succour. Perhaps he has even seen you in your own land ?"

"Perhaps," she said, very gently, "but I do not know his face at all." And she looked down calmly at the unconscious man, who suddenly lifted his arms in a wild gesture, and cried again :

"Elena—Elena, I have come !"

It was a matter of a few moments only before the stranger was carried into the house and put to bed in one of the bedrooms, and whilst Lord Graham dispatched messengers to summon a doctor and a nurse, his wife watched beside the sick man.

He lay very still, and evidently quite unaware of all his surroundings, least of all of the woman who sat watching him, with lips close set in hard, determined lines, and eyes in which that look of hatred burnt afresh.

Her first action, when left alone with him, was to search every pocket of the clothes which had been taken from him but the search was apparently a futile one, for she went to her place by the bedside with a look of relief in her face, and the whisper dropped from her lips :

"Old scores can be settled now !"

* * * * *

Midnight boomed slowly out from the clock over the stables of Dangerfield Hall.

The house was wrapped in profound stillness, and in total darkness, save in the room where the sick stranger lay.

There a shaded lamp cast strange shadows on walls and ceiling, yet giving sufficient illumination to allow the nurse to see the face of the patient.

Consciousness had not returned to him. Beyond the perpetual cry of : "Elena, Elena," he had spoken no word, but lay wrapped in a deadly lethargy, from which he was only roused for his food and medicine.

The doctor had declared that the man was merely suffering from hunger and exhaustion, and that in a few days he would be quite well, and able to give an account of himself, and to this report Lady Graham had listened with a face of grave pleasure, and a few words of suitable satisfaction.

And now, just as midnight boomed from the stable clock, her form might have been seen stealing softly, softly along the corridor between her room and that of the patient. She was fully dressed, for her husband was dining out, and she had said she would sit up for him, although he declared he could not possibly be home till nearly two in the morning.

"I shall like to go now and then to our patient's room, Douglas," she said, "just to assure myself that all is well."

Yet surely it was strange that she should move along the passage with such stealthy feet, and without a light ! Strange that she should start at every sound, and pause with quickly beating heart when the wood of the furniture creaked loudly.

She reached the sick room at last, and opened the door with the extremity of caution and quietness. All within was very silent.

Lady Graham smiled—an evil smile—as her glance fell on the form of the nurse, sleeping soundly in an arm-chair.

"Coffee is a good narcotic sometimes," she murmured, then she crossed the room with swift, yet noiseless tread, and stood looking down at the sick man.

His face was upturned towards her, in the dim light it looked very pathetic and helpless ; the lines of want and suffering were carved deeply upon it.

"Elena," he moaned, stirring restlessly. "I—loved—you !"

No pity, no soft emotion, stirred the face of the woman above him ; she did not even wince, but turned towards the table on which stood a bottle of medicine and a glass.

Then with a sudden quick motion she drew from her bosom a small blue phial, and held it up to the light.

A smile of unspeakable wickedness flashed over the angelic beauty of her face as she murmured :

"Painless and untraceable ! You thought you could baffle me—Elena Huerta ! Poor fool, poor fool, but you were always that, Gonsalez."

As she said the words she turned a little more to the light, and lifting the glass from the table, poured into it the sick man's medicine, then with the utmost deliberation she was preparing to empty into this the contents of the blue phial, when, with a gesture of horror and profound terror, she let the latter slip from her hands.

For her startled glance had seen upon the opposite wall the plain and distinct shadow of a man—a man who must have entered the room unheard, unperceived, and who——

A cry broke from her lips, she stooped, and with hurried, trembling hands, searched the floor for the blue phial, when a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and her husband's voice, stern and changed beyond all recognition, said slowly :

"What is in that phial ? And who is Gonsalez ?"

Was it the sound of the voices ? Was it the natural ending of his strange lethargy ? Who can say ? But at that moment the sick man opened his eyes, and, looking full at Lady Graham whispered passionately :

"Elena ! My wife !"

* * * * *

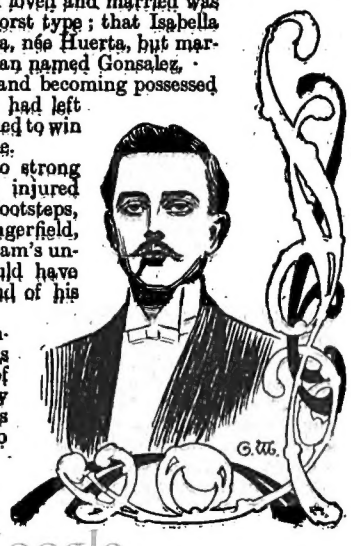
Douglas Graham has never got over the awful discovery that the woman he had loved and married was an adventuress of the worst type ; that Isabella Guarnera was truly Elena, nee Huerta, but married years before to a man named Gonsalez.

Having tired of him, and becoming possessed of a small fortune, Elena had left her native land, determined to win for herself rank and fame.

But Fate had been too strong for her. Gonsalez, her injured husband, had dogged her footsteps, tracing her at last to Dangerfield, where, but for Lord Graham's unexpected return, he would have met his death by the hand of his faithless and evil wife.

Douglas was broken-hearted, but his friends aver that he is well quit of a woman who so terribly fulfilled the wise man's saying : "There is no wickedness like the wickedness of a woman."

L. G. Moberly.



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The Romance of an Unpaid Bill.

BEING THE HISTORY OF A QUARREL.

The barometer stood at "Cloudy" in the pretty little breakfast room at Laburnum Villa, somewhere in Kensington. Furthermore the barometer would have worked round to "Stormy" had it been in any way influenced by the faces of the occupants of the room who were seated at the breakfast table; to wit Gerald Sinclair and Ethel, his wife.

Mrs. Sinclair was a pretty girl of medium height, with violet eyes, a pretty little nose, slightly inclined to Heaven perhaps, a pair of full red lips which seemed made for the express purpose of kissing, a low forehead surmounted by masses of dark brown hair which fell down behind a couple of little coral ears. With all these advantages, still the barometer stood at "cloudy."

Gerald glared at Ethel; Ethel glared back; Gerald glared at the centre of the table, which proceeding was immediately imitated by Ethel.

The object of their resentment lay in the centre of the table, blissfully unconscious of the state of affairs; it was one of those small pieces of paper which tradespeople are in the habit of sending out when money is due to them.

Messrs. Branford and Flower, Ltd., fashionable West End milliners and dressmakers, were responsible for this bill, which amounted to £84 10s., including the remark that a cheque would oblige.

At length Gerald broke the silence.

"We've been married now nearly six months and during that time how you have managed to run up a bill for £84 is beyond my comprehension. You must have been wilfully and needlessly extravagant." This last sentence seemed to please Mr. Sinclair for he repeated "Yes, needlessly extravagant."

"Oh, Gerald," Mrs. Sinclair cried, "I am sure I never had all those things."

"That's just like women; no head for business whatever; do you think a firm like Branford and Flower would make a mistake in an account of that size; as I said before, you have been very extravagant, and the sooner you alter the better."

By this time Gerald was wishing he had not allowed his momentary anger to run away with him and was racking his brains for some means of conciliating Ethel without appearing to be himself in the wrong.

"Needlessly extravagant," he once more repeated. "But—"

"Gerald, how dare you. You—you—unkind"—and here Ethel broke into a flood of tears. "I wish I'd never married you."

Then Gerald got up, threw the morning paper across the room, knocked over a cup of coffee in his haste, and in a cool dignified voice said: "Kindly address all letters to me at the Grand Hotel; I shall not come home until you are in a better frame of mind." Ethel made no answer, simply turned a sullen tear-stained face away from him.

Presently the door slammed and Ethel rising, timidly pulled the curtain on one side and watched her husband stalk down the road looking neither to the right nor left. Womanlike, as soon as it was too late, she endeavoured to recall him by shrieking "Gerald" to the window pane.

Unfortunately for Ethel, window panes are not made of a substance which will transmit sounds, consequently, the only person who heard her cry out, was the advance guard of a German band, who was just coming up the path, doubtless with the idea of obtaining money.

Whether the word "Gerald" resembles any bad language in German, I cannot say, but the representative of the Fatherland hurriedly retreated.

Ethel's repentance was decidedly short-lived, perhaps it was the sight of the German which again upset her, for she seized a cushion, banged the nearest chair in a most brutal manner, looked at Gerald's photograph and said "Beast." Tried to kick the cat out of the way, and failing, once more seized the cushion, aimed it at the cat, and consequently knocked a cup off the table which was situated in an entirely different direction. The cat resented this sudden frontal attack, and by an admirably executed flank movement, gained the open door, and departed.

Her sudden passion having been satisfied by these proceedings, Ethel sat down and thought out a plan of campaign which was briefly this—she would never, never, recall Gerald, she would go to the theatre each night, and thoroughly enjoy herself, in fact, the longer Gerald stayed away, the better she would like it.

As for Mr. Sinclair he reached the office with a murderous glint in his eyes, and one of the juniors remarked to another as Gerald stalked through their public office, "Guess we'd better look out for squalls. Reckon Mrs. S. made him go through the mill this morning."

* * * * *

Now Mr. Gerald Sinclair left the office about four o'clock in a decidedly happier frame of mind. He visited the florist's and bought a huge bouquet, then he invested in two dress circle tickets for the Lyceum; for he had decided to go home to Ethel, go home and tell her how sorry he was for the words he had used.

So it was with a light heart and a latch-key that he opened the door of Laburnum Villa, but the house seemed strangely silent. There was no smiling Ethel to kiss him as he came in.

Going into the dining-room, he threw the flowers and tickets on the table and rang for a maid. "Tell your mistress I am home," he said.

"Please sir Mrs. Sinclair went out about three o'clock and said she was going to the theatre and didn't know what time she would be home."

"All right, Mary, that will do."

The servant withdrew and Gerald was left alone with the flowers, the tickets, and his thoughts, which were not so pleasant as they had sometimes been.

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He got up and paced the room, then he used a truly English word, jammed his hat on and rushed out of the house, fully determined to stay at the Grand Hotel till Ethel sent for him.

When Mrs. Sinclair came down next morning, she observed the flowers and the tickets which Gerald had left behind, then she questioned the servant who informed her that "master came home about five o'clock and when he found you were not at home, he seemed very much put out." This information seemed to please Ethel for she smiled and murmured "Serve him right."

Now Mrs. Sinclair showed a very undecided manner in carrying out her plan of campaign which was, as the reader will doubtless remember, to go to the theatre every night, yet now it was only the second night and she had decided not to go.

About half-past four, tea was tastefully laid for two in the drawing-room. There were those special crumpets Gerald was so fond of, hot and crisp before the fire, and Ethel looking bewitching in her prettiest dress, sat waiting for her lord and master; but five o'clock struck and no Gerald came, the crumpets were getting heavy and the tea cold; six o'clock came, but still no Gerald; evidently he intended carrying out his threat of not coming home, and once more Ethel sought relief by indulging in a good cry. Then once more she visited Gerald's photo and yet again murmured "Beast." What was he doing now she wondered, probably at some music hall with some of those club friends of his, without one thought for his poor little wife, and again she sought relief by going to a theatre.

But all this time what of Gerald? There were no music halls for Gerald that night. He sat and thought before the fire in his private room at the Grand and smoked innumerable pipes.

* * * * *

At the respected firm of Branford and Flower, Ltd., the counting-house clerks were sleeping peacefully when the ting-a-ling of the governor's bell made them all sit up and endeavour to convince each other that they were getting through an enormous amount of work, whilst the small fat office boy fell off his stool in his frantic haste, and tore madly into the governor's room.

Presently he returned with some letters in his hand with instructions to stamp and post them. Complacently he arranged himself on his stool once more and proceeded with his task, but he was sleepy and sleepiness made him perform his work in a half-hearted manner, so that when he stuck a stamp on a letter addressed to Mrs. Gerald Sinclair, Laburnum Villa, Kensington, W., in such a manner that the stamp was obviously out of the perpendicular, he did not trouble to unstick and replace it properly, but simply gazed at it in a sleepy, dejected manner which ought to have had the effect of shifting the stamp, but it didn't, which for reasons that will be seen later, was decidedly for the best.

Now in due course, the letter arrived at Laburnum Villa, Ethel pounced on it, and as is the custom with the female sex, instead of opening it, she fully explored the outside, then turned her attention to the writing and immediately a little scream emitted from her mouth.

"Gerald's writing, what does he mean by it, if he wants to have anything more to do with me let him come here and not write and—Good gracious! the beast has actually dared to stick the stamp on to mean a kiss, how dare he?" And for a third time she addressed Gerald's photograph with the word "Beast." But the photo received this third insult with grave equanimity.

Having thus relieved her feelings, Ethel once more turned her attention to the unfortunate letter which had been the unwilling cause of this outburst.

"I'll not answer it, I'll not take the slightest notice of it, the brute." Whether "the brute" meant the letter or Mr. Sinclair will remain one of those unsolved problems which fade into oblivion.

"I'd rather die than answer it, if he wants to see me, he'd better come and er—er—see me." which latter remark certainly displayed Mrs. Sinclair's profound knowledge of logic; suddenly a happy inspiration struck her as she gazed at the still unopened letter. "I'll send it back without opening it, that will show him I am not the sort of wife to allow herself to be insulted with impunity."

Mrs. Sinclair seemed rather muddled, and whether the insult referred to was receiving the letter, or the quarrel of the previous day, will remain another of those unsolved problems.

Without giving any further thought to her plan of action, she acted immediately and placed the letter in a larger envelope, stuck the stamp on most rigorously perpendicularly, and addressed it to Gerald Sinclair, Esq., Grand Hotel, Nelson Sq., W. Not satisfied with this, she put on her hat and posted the letter herself in the nearest pillar box.

Directly she saw it slide in and heard the rattle as the envelope struck the tin, Ethel wished she could get it back, and even had serious thoughts of waiting and trying to bribe the postman to return it to her, but as her knowledge of the British law consisted of a hazy, dim notion that letters once posted cannot be recovered, she decided not to wait.

Mrs. Sinclair's knowledge of law, in common with most ladies, was extremely large, as she was also aware that dogs mustn't wear muzzles unless they have a collar or must not wear collars in the dog days, something to do with dogs anyway. At any rate, she returned home with a decided wish to cry and once more went and looked at Gerald's photograph, but this time she did not call it "Beast" but kissed it.

Thus we will leave Ethel after her third repentance and follow the letter to Gerald at the Grand Hotel.

* * * * *

Gerald had not felt like work on that day and as junior partners are not always necessary everyday at business places, he had decided not to go to the office.

After a stroll round St. James' Park, he had stood on the suspension bridge and wondered whether Ethel would care if he jumped in and drowned himself. Truly a morbid state of mind, but where is the young man in love who does not have these morbid fits. At any rate Gerald deemed discretion the better part of valour, and so editors were robbed of another horrible tragedy with which to decorate the headlines of their newspapers, which was no doubt very inconsiderate of Gerald.

At any rate, when the porter handed Gerald a letter, on his return to the hotel, in Ethel's handwriting, his low spirits vanished like "Brother Boer," and he could hardly wait till he reached his room to open the letter; when he did so, he was greatly surprised to find, as the reader already knows, another letter inclosed; he took out the second letter and imitated Mrs. Sinclair's actions by looking it over and over. At length he opened it and his wonder was considerably increased by finding a letter addressed to his wife which ran as follows:

London, W.
—, 1900.

Mrs. Gerald Sinclair,
Laburnum Villa,
Kensington, W.

Dear Madam,—*With reference to your account for which we sent bill on Tuesday, we wish to point out that an error has been*

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made, and instead of £84 10s., you should only be charged £34 10s. We very much regret this unfortunate mistake, and trusting to receive the favour of your future orders, we are, madam, yours respectfully,

Branford & Flower, Ltd.

Bill inclosed.

Gerald read this letter through and read it again, but was more puzzled than ever at the second reading. Why ever should Ethel send him a letter that was addressed to herself and evidently without opening or reading it herself. The more he thought, the less he could make of it.

"Whatever did she mean, surely she did not, but why not? Eureka, I've got it," he cried. Then with the true detective instinct, he commenced to get the facts of the case together.

Firstly, he had quarrelled with Ethel because she had been so extravagant.

Secondly, she had stated she had not had all the goods for which she had been charged.

Thirdly, they had parted in anger.

The deductions from these facts were:

Firstly, that Ethel must have repented (she had, several times).

Secondly, that Ethel, recognising the writing of Branford & Flower's letter, had sent it to him as an overture to repentance (she thought she had recognised the writing certainly).

Thirdly, that by so doing, she wished him to come back to her.

Truly Gerald would not have made a Sherlock Holmes, but then how was he to know that Ethel had mistaken Branford & Flower's writing for his. There was certainly a slight similarity which had caused Ethel to immediately jump to the conclusion that it was Gerald's writing, but the similarity was very slight, and therefore such an idea did not enter Gerald's head. His solution was one which 999 out of 1,000 husbands would arrive at, especially if the 999 were husbands of six months' experience only.

Then Gerald arose, put on his hat and coat, paid his bill, and tore out into the street, hailed a cab, which, however, failed to start. Standing up he looked at the cabby's face over the top of the cab, which face wore a look of blank astonishment mingled with unrestrained amusement. "'Scuse me, sir, would you mind telling me where Ethel lives?"

"Go to blazes!" ejaculated Gerald.

"Very well, sir," answered the cabman, "but not in this cab."

"Drive me to Laburnum Villa, Drayton Road, Kensington."

"Right, sir," and once more ensconcing himself in the cab Gerald had the satisfaction of feeling the vehicle move only to be pulled up in a minute by a huge policeman who was directing the traffic. Gerald sat and thought of fearful calamities which he hoped would overtake that policeman, but presently, to his relief, the stream of traffic was allowed to proceed.

He then suddenly thought it would be better if he drove to Branford and Flower's and paid the bill before he saw Ethel, accordingly he did so, and with the receipt safely in his pocket he soon reached the familiar Laburnum Villa.

Throwing the man half a sovereign, Gerald rushed up to the door, fumbled for his latch key, but ere he could get at the key, the door opened, a pair of arms incircled him and gravely threatened the immaculate stiffness of his collar. Not only were there a pair of arms round him, but a pair of lips were kissing him whilst a girlish form clung closely to him. And there they stayed, secure from prying eyes, behaving in a manner peculiar to young people very much in love. Later on when they occupied one chair in front of the fire, the following conversation took place:

"What made you come back—Gerald, darling?"

"Why, sweetheart, because you sent me the bill to pay."

"What bill?" said Ethel.

Then Gerald explained, and Ethel explained, then there was a moment's silence broken by Ethel saying:

"Gerald, women haven't any head for business, Branford & Flower's couldn't make a mistake, could they?"

E. Newton Bungey.

MR. HARKINS' CIGARS.

How a Lover's Advent was Discovered.

The old gentleman looked rather solemn when his beautiful daughter entered the reception-room in response to his summons.

"Rosalind," he said, with the air of a man who has made a disagreeable discovery, "you and young Mr. Harkins were in this room last evening, I believe?"

"Yes, papa," she answered with downcast eyes, "George—that is Mr. Harkins—called last evening, and I received him here."

"He calls about three times a week, according to my count," said the old gentleman, "and I suppose you put in the time discussing literature and art, and all that sort of thing."

"We are both very fond of good literature," ventured the beautiful daughter.

"Of course you are," replied the old gentleman sarcastically. "It takes three sittings a week for you to keep up with the times. Oh, I know all about that, and I am willing to make certain concessions in view of your literary tendencies, but I don't exactly understand this."

The old gentleman pointed to four cigars that were lying on the mantelpiece. The blood instantly mounted to the face of the beautiful daughter, but she did not lose her presence of mind.

"Oh, dear, how stupid of me!" she cried. "George—that is, Mr. Harkins—left those for you last night, and I forgot to give them to you."

"Left them for me?"

"Yes. You see, they're a new brand that he thinks particularly good, and he wants you to try them and see what you think of them. He has great confidence in your judgment, and he——"

She stopped, for the old gentleman had critically examined one of the cigars, and then smelt it, and he was now looking at her over the top of his glasses in a very disconcerting way.

"That's the same cigar he has smoked for six months, to my certain knowledge," he said.

"Oh, then he must have made a mistake——"

"Rosalind," interrupted the old gentleman, "why will you insist upon forgetting that your mother and I went all through this, and know all about it? Mr. Harkins is in the habit of carrying his cigars in his upper left hand vest pocket."

"Ye-es."

"And being a wise young man of considerable forethought, he removed the cigars from what he considered a dangerous locality last evening, and he was so elated when he left that he forgot them. Am I correct?"

"Ye-es, papa."

"And when may I expect him to call upon me?"

"He said he was going to see you this afternoon."

"Very good. He's a careful and painstaking young man, and I am ready to accept him as a son-in-law, but I don't want any daughter of mine to think she can pull the wool over the eyes of an old man who has been through it all."

O. P. W.

Mrs. Woodbury: "And yet you once called me the salt of the earth." Mr. Woodbury: "Nor am I the only man who has found he had the pepper when he thought he had the salt."

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A Ring, a Girl, and a Man.

The Story of a Reunion.

Outside the wind blew shrilly, sending flakes of yesterday's snow with biting fierceness into the faces of pedestrians. Inside, the cold winter air was not felt by the tired girls behind the counters of one of the large shops. Rather did the crowd of changing, thronging shoppers cause a heated atmosphere that gave a throbbing headache to more than one of the tired shop girls.

At last came the lull of early afternoon. The girls, in scattered groups, were making the best of an opportunity for a chat when the street door was flung open to admit a gentleman, who at once attracted their attention.

He was a man of middle age, in full health and vigour; tall, well-formed, with a slight sprinkling of white in his brown hair and moustache; clear-cut features and kindly dark-blue eyes. He bore the marks of a man of wealth and refinement.

He halted at the glove counter, unfastened his great coat, took his hat in hand, and then glanced up pleasantly into the face of the assistant—a young, slender girl, with a tired look in her eyes and a feverish flush on her cheek.

He had opened his lips to speak, but suddenly he checked himself and his dark eyes dilated. Then, recovering his self-possession, he asked for ladies' gloves for evening wear.

"I do not know the number, but—but I judge about the size you wear. If you will be so good as to show me them, perhaps I can judge," he said, gazing first at the pretty, flushed face and then at the slim, white hand, unadorned save for one strange little ring.

That face—that hand—that ring! Was he dreaming, and would it vanish presently, as something of the same vision had so often done during these long years since one so very like this girl had stood beside him in the happy days of youth?

The gloves were brought, a spotless pair of white; but, instead of taking them up, the man continued to gaze into the face of the girl, who flushed deeply. He was about to speak, when another young girl came up and addressed the first.

The gloves fell. Margaret! It was the same sweet name! He felt that he could not leave without some further information as to this girl's identity. This girl must be the child of that other Margaret. But would her child be here? Were they so reduced?

Would that proud, stately woman of his youth have voluntarily returned to her native town, and allow her child to be thus employed? Perhaps she was a widow, poor and struggling, while he—the fires of the old love were kindling anew, and, half dreaming and with an excited flush on his face, he retained his seat.

"Will you take the gloves, sir?" a gentle voice asked. And again he started, with sudden shame at his odd manner.

"Yes, yes!" he answered quickly, "and a pair of the same number for street wear, please. Any colour the ladies like best. They are for a little niece who caught me dozing and consequently I must pay the penalty," he added smiling. The girl gave a responsive smile, wondering who the lucky girl was.

The gloves were wrapped up and handed to him. He could decently remain no longer.

What could he do? When calmly entering the shop a short time ago, he little thought to find himself in such a state of unrest.

"Thank you," he murmured absently, and buttoning up the great coat and replacing his hat he reluctantly left.

At the door a daring thought struck him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said to the shopwalker. "I should like to know the young lady at the glove counter where I just made a purchase."

"I presume you have good reason for your inquiry?" was the reply. "Such questions are rather unusual. Her name is Margaret Russell—her address I cannot give you."

The listener's face became pallid. He took a card from his pocket and handed it to the man.

"This, sir, is my name," he said. "I think the young lady's mother was a dear friend of mine. There is a striking resemblance. Will you kindly hand her the card and tell her that if (his voice trembled slightly)—if her mother is living, I should like to meet her again? Ask her to take the card home and explain the incident. I shall come in to-morrow," and with a bow he departed.

Mr. Jones, the shopwalker, gazed upon the piece of cardboard and read engraved thereon, "Mr. Philip J. Hunter." The address guaranteed wealth, and the name was one of which he had frequently heard in connection with philanthropic deeds and much that was good, so, to the vast amusement and universal interest of all the girls near by, he fulfilled the odd request.

* * * * *

It was a pleasant little dining-room, bright and cosy, with a small table laid with a pretty white cloth, and places for two.

By a little side table, on which was a small lamp, sat a woman, no longer young, but still pleasing to look upon, save that the cheeks were a trifle hollow and the face pale. She was busily at work upon some fine embroidery. Other finished pieces lying about spoke of the work she did to assist the income brought in by her child.

A step sounded outside the door, and a moment later the young girl of the glove counter episode entered. The woman looked up with a sweet smile, and rose, laying aside the work and greeting the girl with a caress.

When her hat and coat had been removed, Margaret, with a mischievous look on her face, drew the card from her purse, and, stopping her mother as she placed the teapot upon

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the table, held it before her eyes. "Did you know this person, mamma? Have you ever seen that name before?" she asked her, half playfully, half seriously.

"Philip!" the mother exclaimed, with a catch in the breath, almost painful. "Why—why, Margaret, child, where did you get that card?" and, nervously putting out her hand for it, the mother suddenly sat down.

Then, in a few words, the girl told all she knew of the incident, and described in glowing terms the handsome gentleman's appearance.

"And so, dear mamma, you do know him. Please tell me something about him—and if to-morrow when he comes I may permit him to call to see you, as he wishes?"

"Yes! No! I hardly know what to say, darling. I do not know if it were better or not that we meet again. It is a very commonplace story, dear, but I will tell you.

"We were once devoted to one another. Both were jealous and very proud. He said some unkind words which I resented and refused to forgive. Later I left for the North. There I met your father, whom I respected very much, and who soon persuaded me to marry him. Then, of course, I dared not think of my earlier love, and soon rumours reached me of his marriage.

"After carrying out your father's dying request and burying him in his native city, I could not spare the little means I had to go back to the North. In Margaret Russell only a few dear friends recognised and sought the Margaret Young of earlier days.

"I knew Philip had grown to wealth and position in his own town, but did not expect to meet him in our humble sphere. I know, too, that he never married. What do you say, darling, should we be ashamed of our humble home, a simple flat, with a room which serves as dining-room, sitting-room, and drawing-room?" she concluded, glancing about her and contentedly smiling.

Margaret was silent. She had been so much to her mother and she to her, and if he came—only too well Margaret foresaw the inevitable.

She recalled the emotion of the man, and now saw a new light in her mother's soft brown eyes.

Could she be so unselfish as to say one word to prevent the meeting? And if—well—her dear mother would be relieved of all further cares and trials and be restored to her former position. It was characteristic of her sweet, unselfish little heart that she saw no future benefit just then for herself.

"Let him come, mamma, dearest. I am sure it will be best," she said, striving to keep down a sigh that would come. Little supper was eaten that night, and the talk was all of Mr. Hunter.

So, when the tall, handsome man sought the glove counter on the morrow, Margaret gracefully offered him her hand and told him how well her mother remembered her old friend, and that she would be pleased to see him again at their home.

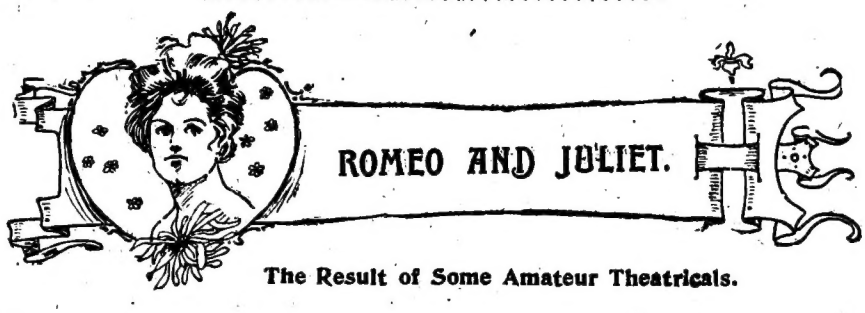
He responded with a look of intense satisfaction and a warm clasp, saying simply, "I will be there to-night."

Margaret was dreadfully upset all day, and undecided as to her part in this pretty romance. Should she go home from the shop, or go to a friend's first to leave them uninterrupted?

After much pondering and some little heartache and stealthy tears, too, she decided to let her mother think it was she entering, when it would actually be her old friend and lover! It would, perhaps, make it easier for both, and later Margaret's friend could see her home, when matters had been adjusted.

As she planned, so indeed, it was, and upon entering the cosy room, now bearing no resemblance to a dining-room, she found two happy faces, looking years younger and handsomer in the blessings of being reunited.

Agatha Alston.



The Result of Some Amateur Theatricals.

Juliet sat on a clothes'-horse, shivering in her burial robes under a muff and tippet.

To-night's rehearsal had been the worst of all. Nobody seemed to take any interest or to enter into the spirit of it; the thing had dragged so long the enthusiasm was all dissipated, the players went through their parts like marionettes, and the twenty-fourth was only three days off. It looked as though the whole affair would be a failure.

It was out of the question to give it up now, however, for the members of the club had pledged themselves for fifty pounds towards the fund, so there was nothing to do but see the miserable thing through to the bitter end and then give up the East-End Amateur Dramatic Club forever. Yes, indeed, forever and ever!

When nobody else felt any responsibility or tried to take himself seriously, why should she? This decision cost her more than anyone guessed, for it meant the death blow to the hope she had secretly cherished of treading the professional boards.

As the president of the club, she had selected the play, unselfishly reserving for herself the star *rôle*, given the use of her music room for the rehearsals, and worked very hard to keep the other members satisfied with their *rôles*; and now, three days before the performance, the company was no nearer perfection than it was a month ago. It did seem hard after all she had done.

The nurse, who was just beginning to get a little meaning in her lines, catches the influenza, the stupid carpenter sends up a balcony so high that Juliet must needs stoop to keep her head from being lost in the clouds, and Jack, the perfidious, has had the impudence to tell her that her Juliet would be a good Galatea.

Although she did not know it, this was the sole reason for her dejection. The balcony and the influenza were not irremedial, but her quarrel with Jack, in the light of her overwrought nerves, certainly was. If he had been decently civil and apologised afterwards, she would not have cared, but he had laughed—laughed outright in her face—and before the whole company, as if he had thought it a good joke.

And she had been saying such nice things about his Romeo. She had even confided to Tybalt that Jack's Romeo was at times really inspiring, but, of course, that was all a mistake, for Jack's acting could never have been anything but abominable.

The energy with which she came to this decision brought the clothes'-horse and the hysterical leading lady to the floor with a crash. Friar Laurence and Lady Capulet, who had been dancing in the hall, came running in to see what was the matter, and the sneezing nurse, still full of her *rôle*, ran to Juliet with something that sounded like:

"What ho, Lady-bird! Dow what's the batter with you?" While the perfidious Romeo sauntered in and coolly picked Juliet up, and deposited her on top of an improvised tomb.

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"Will you please just l—leave me al—lone, Mr. Davis!" sobbed the offended Juliet to her astonished rescuer.

"Why, what have I done?" exclaimed Romeo. "You didn't think I meant what I said about Galatea, did you? Well, any way, I take it all back. You'd be a better Niobe now."

And Jack, lost to every spark of decency, seemed to think he was witty, and he laughed again.

When at last the troupe had dispersed, and the heartless Jack had called back from the door as if nothing had happened, "Good night, little Niobe; hope you'll feel better to-morrow," she dragged her bruised knees, that still bore the impress of the clothes'-horse, upstairs, and crept into her little bed where, alone in the dark, the tragedy, the tomb, and the family losses of the real Juliet seemed as nothing compared with the sorrows she, Amy Harper, had to bear.

The following day Miss Amy was kept a prisoner in her room and threatened with a rest cure when her "absurd theatricals" were over if she did not take things more calmly; and the violets Jack sent up as a peace offering were promptly bestowed on the housemaid, who was down with the measles.

That night a very red-eyed, reproachful Juliet listened to Romeo's intreaty to "Speak again, bright angel!" But the bright angel's voice was shaken with anger when, after having electrified her audience of chairs with the lines that led up to—"I'll frown and be perverse and say——" the incorrigible Jack had muttered so loud everyone in the wings could hear, "Lord, no! Don't be any more perverse than you naturally are."

The night of the twenty-fourth the company assembled or the first time promptly at the appointed hour. The stage carpenter, costumier, property man and dresser, were all fuming and squabbling over belated details, but the players themselves were preternaturally calm, nerved by a grim determination to do or die, owing, perhaps, to a dose of bromide Mrs. Harper had administered to the actors as they entered the door.

Amy's fears that something might go wrong, that someone might forget his lines or be seized with stage-fright, were somewhat allayed when she saw how the crucial test affected her.

She was perfectly composed, knew every line forwards and backwards, and felt serenely confident she was going to acquit herself as the president of the East-End Amateur Dramatic Club should.

She had, in fact, so far recovered from the despair of a few minutes before that she had asked an out-of-town manager to be present with a view to trying her fortune on the stage.

The nervousness and anxiety of the past few weeks had told somewhat on her looks, but when she saw the reflection of Juliet in her ball gown she began to feel there was after all, some sweetness and satisfaction to be had out of life, although she was not on speaking terms with Jack.

The nurse was sufficiently recovered to go through with her part, and she certainly did do it creditably, and, as for Romeo, a week ago she would have said he was superb.

The house filled early, for the association had conscientiously sold twice as many tickets as there were chairs. As the play progressed, and the house grew more enthusiastic, the players responded to the encouragement of a sympathetic audience and did better than they had ever done at the rehearsal.

To be sure, Mercutio's sword, made of Chinese coins, fell to pieces with the challenge, "Come, sir, your passado!" but he had slipped it into his pocket so deftly that the mishap had not been generally noticed; and the moon, which was a lantern supported on the step-ladder by Tom Harper, wobbled whenever Tom started giggling, but these were mere trifles.

On the whole the play was going well and the players were outdoing themselves. So far there had not been a hitch either with the scenery or the actors, every line was spoken so glibly that the prompter's voice was completely drowned.

Amy was breathing long, deep breaths of relief, for she had maintained that if everything did not go off smoothly she should die of mortification, and when at last Mercutio was safely laid she felt safe, for she had been more anxious about him than in regard to any of them.

Under the stress of excitement Amy lost herself when she was on the stage, in the passion of Juliet. Her eyes shone verily like "two of the fairest stars," and when, in her earnestness, she leant near and looked into Romeo's eyes with a radiance that glowed even through the grease paint, assuring him, "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, my love as deep," he swore to himself that Amy was adorable.

Every time the curtain rang down the house resounded with applause, and the actors consequently felt pleased with themselves and all the world.

Romeo and Paris did their duel scene valiantly, and after Romeo, having quaffed his poison, lay dying comfortably—and he managed to fall on a cushion—Juliet glided across the stage with her, "I will kiss thy lips. Haply some poison yet doth hang on them——"

As she bent low over the prostrate Romeo to suit the action to the words, the page, young Tom Harper, and Friar Laurence saw the dead man make a sudden movement, and Juliet found herself held in a very substantial grasp.

She had not counted on the revivifying effect her kiss might have on the stark Montague, and she reached for his dagger to utter the lines she had been eager to reach throughout the evening.

The house had rung for weeks past with her last agonies of grief, she had become so imbued with her *rôle* that her lightest tones and most commonplace remarks were thrilled with a tragic tremor; she had worn herself almost ill practising for the death-scene, and she felt, with a pardonable pride, that this was her crowning piece of work.

And now Romeo, incorrigible beyond all belief, who had done his own death scene splendidly and won his applause, detained her. The watch within began to get uneasy, the prompter's voice rang out in impatient tones, and there was a slight stir in the audience; finally the watch, out of all patience, commanded:

"Lead boy—which way?"

But young Tom stood still, shaking with laughter and pointing to Romeo. The situation was becoming strained, but the dead Montague insisted:

"Promise me, now."

Tears of anger and mortification welled up in Juliet's eyes, her hand was held in a vice, she could not reach the dagger, there was an unrestrained rustle of apprehension in the audience and a murmured:

"She has forgotten her lines, what a pity!" reached her ears. The prompter's voice shrilled across the stage, "Then I'll be bri—e—f," and Romeo closed his eyes on her agony, prepared to hold on all night if need be. It was no longer the dead Romeo but John Davis, cool and determined as she had never seen him, who tightened his grasp and urged, "Say 'yes,' and I'll let you go!"

Juliet deliberated as long as she dared, then at the last moment, when the strain could be endured no longer, and the audience was beginning to wonder where the "hitch" might be, she flashed out in a happy voice with not a trace of the tragic thrill she had so prided herself upon:

"Yes, Jack! Then I'll be brief—Oh, happy dagger! This is thy sheath; there rust and let me die."

And forgetting to stab herself she fell into his arms.

Vernon Owen.

Only Two More Weeks,

and then Mr. R. Norman Silver's great new serial will start in *Short Stories*. March 7th is the date of the paper, and it will be on sale on March 3rd. Many good serials have been published in *Short Stories*, but this new one will beat them all in power, dramatic situations, love, interest, and other points which go to make up a good story. Don't omit to place your order early; by so doing you will prevent disappointment. Remember that good things always go quickly, and that the date of the issue of *Short Stories* you want particularly is March 7th.

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HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister.

ALPHONSE HERVÉ. An eminent French artist in love with Belinda.

PRINCESS VERA ZOULOFF. A celebrated Russian beauty.

BARON ROLLA. An extremely wealthy Parisian, in love with Belinda.

PAUL DE SONNAZ. A young French nobleman, and friend of Lady Peggy.

Belinda Plays the Heroine.

I SHALL always remember it in Toffy's favour that she immediately grasped the significance of the discovery; only for a moment did she show doubt as to how the card came into Belinda's possession.

Then, with a quick movement, she crossed to where the girl stood, and lightly drew the card from its hiding-place.

"You're real smart," she said; "and as good as gold. To think you should have dropped on *this*"—she held the card at arm's length—"for the sake of a woman like Celia Dawtrey. I know it was under the handkerchief. Oh!" as Celia rapped out a shrill denial; "I don't mind how much you deny, I know better. You had the card under your handkerchief. You're as much a cheat as any card-sharper or blackleg.

"It's not a bit of use for you people to make a noise and try to stop me," continued Toffy, lapsing into the vernacular of her earlier days. "It's the fashion to cover things up in smart Society, I know, but there are some things that I won't cover up, and cheating at cards"—she called it 'kyards'—"is one. I've seen a man shot at sight for what this woman's done. I tell you she's not fit for decent folk to live with. It's not the first time she's done it, I know."

Heaven alone can tell what awful disclosures the Yankee was about to make! We had all endeavoured to repress her, but in vain. Her high treble had defeated all our efforts; clear above the murmurs of women fearful lest they should be the next victim of Toffy's candour, her shrill pipe had sounded. Rolla himself had vainly tried to stem the torrent. It was Belinda who closed the incident.

"Look," she said sharply; "the poor thing's ill. It's cowardly of you not to leave her alone. You've said enough already. I won't listen to another word. Alphonse"—she turned appealingly to the artist—"take her away." And she pointed to the dejected Celia, who sat huddled in a chair.

The artist rose to the occasion and half led, half carried, the childish figure with the painted face out of the room.

Those that remained looked blankly at each other. Toffy had made it impossible for us to pass over the occurrence. Once a woman is openly accused of a Society crime—cheating at cards—indeed, any sort of sharp practice with one's friends comes under that heading—she is doomed. That women—great ladies some of them—do cheat, we know, that they suffer from kleptomania we know also, as do some of the biggest shop-keepers in London and Paris, but we keep the knowledge to ourselves.

The proprietor of a *magasin* in the Louvre has a book in which there are confessions of theft, signed with some of the greatest names in British and foreign Society. He is a tactful person, and never openly accuses anyone; as madame, the kleptomaniac, turns to leave the shop, however, she is politely asked to step into the managerial sanctum, there she is told that she must sign a confession, and pay so much to a charity or face a public exposure! The former is invariably her choice; the manager is discreet, she goes upon her way, free to pick up unconsidered trifles elsewhere, but never more is she permitted to enter his shop.

I knew for a fact that Celia's name was amongst the list, but I never mentioned it. I assumed ignorance of that and other things like the rest of the world. Toffy had made that ignorance impossible. She had spoken out.

Celia knew the fate in store for her as well as anyone. She left La Caprice the next morning. Gradually, and by slow degrees, she dropped out of our set. When last I heard of her she was living in a third-rate Continental gaming resort—where her pretty painted face still brings her admiration. Mr. Dawtrey makes her an allowance but declines to live with her. He has no use for a wife "out of Society."

Things were somewhat strained in the *château* after that evening. People looked even more askance at Belinda for championing Celia than at Toffy for unmasking her. Rolla renewed his matrimonial overtures to my charge, but was quietly and firmly rejected.

I had had a letter from Vera while at La Caprice. She spoke of leaving Petersburg as soon as possible, and journeying through Italy.

"I shall be at Florence in September," she wrote, "when I shall expect *ma chère* Belinda!"

At Florence, as she had foretold, they met; but the fashion of their meeting was far otherwise than she expected. There in the City of Flowers was to be played the last scene in a stormy life, the final chapter of the beautiful Russian's love-story would be told.

Meanwhile Belinda and I said farewell to Trouville, and Alphonse—fully restored to health—returned to Paris. He was still a staunch friend to Belinda, but—I noted it with much annoyance—his passion for her was over.

If he should journey to Florence and meet Vera—I saw my castle topple to the ground!

Farringdon, good-humoured as ever, was accompanying us. Belinda had had charming letters from his mother and sisters

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and seemed much pleased with them. They were quiet, old-fashioned sort of people, who disliked "bridge" and discounted anything within a mile of being "smart." That, I suppose, was the reason of their regard for Belinda!

Among the crowd of pleasure-seekers at Trouville, I had met a certain Archduke of my acquaintance. He was a fascinating man and in his time had been a handsome one. He was old now, but he still retained his appreciation of a pretty woman, and, struck by Belinda's face and figure, he begged that we would stay at his *châlet*, a delightful little place, tucked away among the Austrian mountains.

The Archduke was of the old school. That is to say, he was polished in manner and in speech, and had a horror of women like Toffy and Celia Dawtrey. We met some old acquaintances at the *châlet*, amongst them Lady Saxby and Paul de Sonnaz.

It caused our host intense amusement to see Belinda and her ladyship together, the one tall and straight, with calm, untroubled eyes, devoid of any fripperies of dress or conversation. The other all gesture and grimace, in a wonderful toilette of red and black, scarlet shoes with silver heels, and a tall ebony cane.

"What a beautiful creature she is," said the old diplomatist as Belinda passed him.

"Beautiful as a statue," I answered; "but oh, how dull."

He laughed and shook his head.

"She is not of our world," he said; "so much the worse for us," and he sauntered down the path that led to the waterside, where waited a very pretty awning-shaded, flower-decked barge, with breakfast spread under the soft grey sky above the green water.

Life at the *châlet* was an idyll to those given over to open-air delights; there were the mountains, wild, beautiful, where eagles made their nests, and where the chamois flashed from peak to peak; great tracks of woodland where the trees are giants, moss-grown with age, set in a wilderness of ferns and flowers, and the distant hills gleam half light, half gloom among the branches. The place is full of birds and all wild woodland creatures. Where any wood has been cleared there are tracks of lilac, heather and of broom. A wonderful place, more exquisite than I can tell you.

Perhaps the scene might not appeal to some of you. I don't want to be offensive, but really you women of the middle class have not much sense of the beautiful. I saw a British matron over at Venice; she stood in the very shadow of St. Mark's—one of the wonders of the world—and in the face of that exquisite jewel of architecture she munched a ham sandwich, and bitterly lamented that it lacked the proper quantity of mustard!

Now a Society woman may do much that she ought not to do, but she certainly wouldn't munch ham in front of St. Mark's.

Those of us who were sated with the beautiful Austrian scenery drove into the quaint old town near the *châlet*, and lolled away a morning in a swinging chair in the river balconies smoking Turkish cigarettes and drinking hock.

To spend August in the uplands of Austria is to taste the best of the summer. There no tourist comes; the Society butterfly sips enjoyment in undisturbed serenity.

Year after year some of the best born, and the most beautiful women in Europe are to be found here. Life goes softly, smoothly, like a laugh on a summer' day.

It was while we were staying at the *châlet* that Belinda did me an injury. Up to that time I had not regarded the girl with any marked dislike. I had been vexed with her, angry and annoyed at her obstinacy, vexed at her opposition to my will. But inasmuch as she had never directly injured me I was tolerant, and for the most part amiably disposed towards her. That which now occurred brought about a radical alteration to my feelings.

I have mentioned somewhere in this series that the foolish but kind-hearted Crawley had suggested I should find a husband for myself rather than Belinda. It was to this end he arrived one day at the Archduke's in company with a certain little Jew, of pronounced features, large income, and little or no manners.

The Archduke knew Crawley well, and allowed him considerable latitude, otherwise Klinski, as the little financier was called, would not have been welcome.

"He's not much to look at, I know, Peggy," said Crawley deprecatingly, "and his manners are worse than none; but he's simply rolling in money. He could pave Rotten Row with nuggets and never turn a hair."

"As a husband, he's impossible, Crawley."

"He need not be seen. You could keep him well out of the way."

I shook my head. "Impossible! He's not the sort of man to give anything for nothing. He'll pay for all he has, and pay well, but he'll get his money's worth. Come, Crawley, how much did he advance you on the chance of the Archduke's invitation?"

Crawley blushed and blinked in a shame-faced sort of way.

"I'm rather short myself just now," I went on. "If——"

"I can let you have a couple of hundred if that's any good, Peggy," he said hastily.

I accepted the offer, and decided that my friend had made every penny of £2,000 out of the Jew.

I daresay you wonder how I managed for money all this time. My answer is the same as my exchequer was—Hardy North. He was ready to pour out cheques on the least necessity. His joy at the news that Belinda was the guest of an Archduke was childlike; he sent me a present of a turquoise necklace and a diamond brooch as well.

All the same, I had no money to spare; there are so many and such heavy expenses in Society. You must not wear the same dress more than three times at the most, and you change your jewellery with your gown.

The little Jew financier should, I decided, help me to form a nest egg, which with Belinda's £20,000, would keep me from poverty, if not in luxury. Klinski had all the quickness of his race, and soon learnt to conceal his objectionable self-confidence. He readily understood that if a man cannot distinguish, he must extinguish himself in Society.

It was not necessary for me to reject his matrimonial proposals, he had sufficient good sense not to make them.

I approved the man's insight, and rewarded him by a little friendly counsel. He responded gratefully to my teaching, and one evening after a long and somewhat tedious dinner, I drew him into conversation in a room opening on to the terrace,

To make a long story short, I told him that Belinda was a profitable speculation in which he might, if he paid high enough for the privilege, take shares.

"She is engaged to Lord Farringdon," I said nonchalantly. "On her marriage her father will make over some £300,000 to the bridegroom. Meantime Lord Farringdon has, like most other young men, expensive tastes, all of which his income will not supply. A matter of £10,000 would, I think, be very useful to him just now. You understand," I stared straight in Klinski's eyes, "that I should not mention this to you if I were not sure of your discretion. A word of what I have mentioned and——"

"Your Ladyship may rely upon my utter and complete secrecy."

"That is hardly the word, Mr. Klinski. A tactful silence is what you want—if you wish to get on."

He bit his lip and bowed profoundly.

"His Lordship would like perhaps——"

"His Lordship does not wish to appear upon the scene," I said sharply. "You are a man of the world, Mr. Klinski, and will understand how matters lie when I tell you that there is a certain person who considers she

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has claims on Lord Farringdon. Miss North must not hear of her existence; but to remain unknown the person requires £10,000. I, as Miss North's guardian, and the dear and intimate friend of old Lady Farringdon, am willing, I may say desirous, of settling the matter. I shall pay the money on Farringdon's behalf, and will give you my own note of hand for the amount."

"Which Lord Farringdon will redeem on his wedding day?" said the odious little wretch.

"So long as it *is* redeemed, I don't suppose you will mind who pays the money," I said coldly.

Once let me get Belinda married and I felt sure I could squeeze an extra ten thousand out of North. If not, if all my schemes went wrong, well, Klinski could only enforce his bond on Farringdon's marriage with the girl. Anyway, I stood to win.

For a moment the Jew studied me with his small, keen eyes. Then, bending forwards, he said softly,

"I may rely on your social patronage—if this is arranged—Miladi?"

I nodded lightly, and gave him a few words of encouragement.

"Then," he said with an expansive smile, "I agree. I advance you £10,000 on behalf of his Lordship—which will be repaid with interest on the day that he marries Miss North.

Before I could reply, before indeed I could take breath, an indignant young voice cried outside the open window from the terrace:

"I shall never marry Lord Farringdon—*never* after what I have heard," and with flaming cheeks Belinda entered and confronted us. "Besides," she flung up her head, "there is not even a definite engagement between us. I agreed to consider his proposal for three months. That time has not yet elapsed. To think," she turned on Klinski with a fine scorn, "to think that I should have to make these explanations, to render an account of my proceedings to *you*," and she flashed a look of such contempt and scorn that the Jew flinched.

Then turning to me she cried:

"How could you, Lady Peggy, how could you try to persuade me to marry such a mean, base man as, you say, Lord Farringdon is?"

For a moment I hesitated what to answer. Then a quick feeling of resentment stirred within me.

"It is not Farringdon who is mean," I cried. "It is you, who condescends to such an underhand proceeding as to listen outside doors and windows, to overhear other people's conversation. You shall come with me at once and repeat what you have just said to Farringdon himself. You have cruelly misjudged him."

I took her by the arm and led her from the room. Needless to say she did not confront his Lordship—at her earnest appeal I waived that part of the proceeding, and succeeded to a certain degree in softening her opinion of his character.

But as I have said before, the events of that evening brought about a revolution in my attitude to the girl. But for her Klinski would have advanced me £10,000, but for her——My indignation rose to a white heat against her. I set my teeth, and decided that henceforth I would fight her with any weapons. I would compel her by force or strategy to marry.

We passed from Austria to the Palace of a great Russian lady, very old, and fabulously wealthy. On the borders of the Baltic, the Ortoff Palace is one of the most magnificent of the many stately mansions in Russia. It is a very grand place, with acres of palm houses and glasshouses; vast stables full of thoroughbred horses of the famous Ortoff breed. It has a theatre with a stage as large as any public place of entertainment, where divas of European repute think it an honour to perform. It is as wonderful a place as Versailles, with hundreds of halls and chambers and a staircase up which thirty men might have walked abreast. It boasts many and rare works of art, precious marbles, great pictures, statues in bronze, in silver, and in the costly malachite.

Within a stone's throw of the house are vast forests, in which the bear, the boar, and the wolf are hunted with a splendour, and, I am bound to say, a barbarity inconceivable in Britain.

We arrived at the Palace late in the afternoon, just as the sun was tipping the snow tops of the distant hills with red, casting a deeper shadow upon the waters of the Baltic.

All through the journey Belinda had spoken but little, and I, filled with rage and bitterness at my failure with Klinski and with Farringdon, sat silently beside her. His Lordship did not accompany us to Russia, he was to meet us at Florence in September, where, as you will remember, Vera also was to be.

All through the dinner and the evening concert that followed, I sat, my brain on fire seeking to find a way to subdue Belinda's will.

Farringdon, I realised, was no longer a factor in the game. David or no David, I felt she would not tolerate his Lordship. It would be necessary that I should have an ally in my plan, a man without principle or money. Such a one I had ready to my hand—Eastacres, with his cold smile and steely eyes.

But, and this was the puzzle, how could I influence or rather break Belinda's will? I could not send her for a time to Siberia, neither could I have her beaten as the Russian husbands—moujik and Prince alike—beat their wives.

As I pondered there flashed into my mind a means, a dangerous means by which I might attain my end. During the next few days certain events took place which rendered my plan more easy of fulfilment.

I have already alluded to the great bear hunts that took place in the forests that fringed the grounds of the Ortoff Palace. Whole days were given up to the delights of the chase; the beasts were not infrequently driven through the forest right into the huge court of the Palace, there to receive the *coup-de-grace* in full sight of the Palace windows. The savage that lies under the soft manners, the exquisite courtesy of the Russ, is uppermost at those times.

The scene is of the fiercest description—a wild *melée* of men and beasts. The hunters' knives glisten in the moonlight, the dying beasts, with the cruel steel in their necks, turn their blood-shot eyes up to the windows of the great house where the women are eagerly watching. Some of us were not content to watch; Lady Saxby, with pistols in her belt, and her blue tunic girt round with a silver belt, went out to see the bear's death struggle at close quarters, or to help give the last stroke to a wolf.

Belinda had a horror of these scenes, and turned sick and faint at the sounds from the court-yard. Why this should be, I was rather puzzled to know, the girl was by no means a coward, it seemed strange to display such emotion at the slaughter of wild beasts.

She was especially indignant at the women joining in the fray, and had a bitter quarrel with Lady Saxby on that account. On one occasion she was not content with mere verbal expostulation, but rushed from the Palace into the court, a tall figure in long white gown with flashing eyes and pale, proud face.

"It's inhuman!" she cried. "Wicked!" She dashed towards the corner of the court where Lady Saxby was waiting for Paul de Sonnaz to give the death thrust to a huge bear.

Suddenly the wounded beast rose to his hind legs and with an awful snarl aimed a huge blow with his paw, that stretched de Sonnaz on the ground.

With an awful shriek Lady Saxby faced round, her courage gone, ready to leave Paul to his fate, if only she could escape.

Stooping to pick de Sonnaz's rifle from the ground, Belinda aimed at the bear. The great beast swayed, struck a blow

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with his formidable paw, that grazed the girl's shoulder, and then fell a lifeless heap of brown fur upon the ground.

Belinda was of course the heroine of the occasion; she was picked up and carried unconscious to her room, and medical aid was summoned.

The wound was not dangerous, but she had sustained a severe shock, and it became necessary to put her under the influence of narcotics. She responded easily to the action of the drug, and, as is often the case with certain temperaments, showed a docility of disposition utterly foreign to her disposition when under its influence.

By the doctor's orders I did not decrease the dose even when she was well enough to leave her room.

The last evening of our stay at the Ortoff Palace, was a memorable one; we were in the most magnificent of the many reception rooms, a place of marble, inlaid with malachite, and hung with gorgeous tapestries from the east; tall palms waved their high heads towards the vaulted roof, and the air was heavy with the scent of orange blossoms.

The entertainment that evening was a popular one at that time; a clever palmist had come all the way from Paris to read our hands. These persons are, for the most part, the agents for private detectives and money-lenders on a large scale, to whose interest it is to know as much as possible of the private life of their clients.

Belinda, like most young girls, was deeply interested to know all that could be told her of the future. Suddenly, just as the palmist was foretelling her happy marriage and various other impossible things, Belinda started to her feet, and with a low cry rushed to where Paul de Sonnaz was sitting.

"Look," she cried, "look!" And, seizing his arm, she pointed to the window.

"That face," she cried, "that awful face!" Shuddering she pointed once again into the night. And as I followed her gaze, something of the terror, the horror that she felt, laid hold of me.

(The explanation of the appearance of this face will be told next Tuesday.)

"Robert, dear, how do you suppose those dozens and dozens of empty bottles ever got into the cellar?" "Why, I don't know, my dear; I never bought an empty bottle in my life."

Young Man: "Is there any er—tunnel on your railway?" Railway Official: "Yes, thirty of them. The line is a favourite one with newly-married couples. Book you a couple of tickets?"

Young Wife: "But, Charles, before we were married you said that my slightest wish should be gratified." Young Husband: "Yes, Maria; but there's nothing slight about a three-guinea bonnet."

Reggie: "I heard papa say the other day that labour is sweet and noble." Mamma: "So it is, Reggie." Reggie: "Then, mamma, why does papa get a man to cut the grass, while he sits on a chair and only looks on?"

Scene—A Sunday-school. Johnnie: "I say, Miss Jones, I know now why you didn't want me to rob birds' nests last spring." Miss Jones (who has on a new hat): "Why was it, Johnnie?" Johnnie (gazing with admiring eyes at the hat): "'Cause you wanted the birds to grow big enough to wear 'em."

"No," said Ethel, "I'm afraid I shall never see Harold again." "Why? Have you offended him?" "Yes. I was giving him a nice, sisterly talk, and said that I was afraid he was leading an aimless existence." "Did he get angry?" "Yes. You see, he has the reputation of being the worst shot in the Rifle Corps."

Mrs. Purskey: Please, sir, I want one o' them thum—um—things; yer know, sir, as reggylates the 'eat of a room." Chemist: "Thermometer, you mean, ma'am, I suppose?" Mrs. P. (eagerly): "Yes, sir, that's it, sir. And if you'll be so kind, sir, to set it to 'sixty-five,' 'cause that's what the doctor says I'm to keep the room at."

Your Editor Chats.

Among the claims sent in by readers for one of the £10 notes offered by "Dayton," I have received one from Earl Poulett (late Viscount Hinton). His reason for wanting the £10 he gives as follows: "It would assist me in prosecuting my claim to the Poulett peerage, which is expected to be heard in the House of Peers either at the end of February or the beginning of March."

In order to ascertain whether the application was really that of Earl Poulett, I wrote to him at the address given in London, asking him to call and see me. A few days later I received a wire from Canterbury saying he was at St. Margaret's Hall in that city, and would call upon me when he returned to town. When he came subsequently he told me that he was touring the country for the purpose of raising money to prosecute his claim by giving entertainments in various towns.

I think readers will agree with me that Earl Poulett is justified in sharing the £10 note with Mr. R. S. Tunnell, 108 Grantham Road, Clapham, who wishes to take out a patent for an improvement in cycles.

Mr. R. Norman Silver, whose remarkable sensational novel "Held Apart" will shortly commence publication in *Short Stories*, belongs to that group of writers who find the best atmosphere for work in some public place. His favourite resort, when bent on the production of "copy," is a corner in a London restaurant much patronised by foreigners, and, as a matter of course, served by waiters of extremely mixed nationality. He uses a fountain pen, small sheets of paper, and writes an almost microscopic hand. Once, when more than ordinarily absorbed in some exciting situation of his characters, a bland German face approached his table and a guttural bass inquired: "Exguse me, sir, but what for you make so liddle writing?" Mr. Silver confessed himself unable to explain the peculiarity, which, however, enables him to crowd some five hundred words onto a sheet scarcely larger than an ordinary "Court" envelope. With the first instalment of his new serial I shall reproduce a specimen of his writing.

In a fortnight's time you will be able to enter the splendid new competition which starts in *Short Stories*. It is certainly one of the most original competitions ever devised, and I am sure will be a huge success. In view of the tremendous attractions which will be embodied in the issue of *Short Stories* for March 7th, I would ask you to make sure of securing a copy by asking your newsagent well in advance to reserve it for you.

Your Editor.

The £10 offered in the Fourth "Dayton" Competition has been divided between Earl Poulett (formerly Viscount Hinton), 17 Henry Street Buildings, Pentonville, N.W., and Mr. R. S. Tunnell, 108 Grantham Road, Clapham, S.W., each of whom has received £5.

The winner of the £10 offered in the Final "Dayton" Competition is Miss Annie Thorne, 4 Nile Street, Landport, Portsmouth.

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MRS. COOPER'S NIECE.

The Story of a Romantic Love Affair.

"Philip," said old John Briggs to his son, "you are twenty-eight years old to-day."

"So the family record says, father," responded the elegant young gentleman addressed. "I am disposed to place implicit reliance upon it and on you."

"You have done nothing since you left college but kill time."

"It is only retaliation in advance, sir. Some day or other the old chap with the scalp-lock and scythe will kill me."

"You are too flippant. Since your aunt Priscilla left you a thousand a year you have done nothing but spend the money. Your income ought to be enough for a single man, but you draw on me, too."

"I'll try to draw on you less, sir."

"It is not that, Philip. You are quite welcome to a cheque now and then, for I know that you neither gamble nor gad about town, and I don't mind your horses, your club, your natural history craze, or your luxurious tastes. But still you spend more money and get less for it than most young men of your age—have too much, in fact."

"I don't find it too much, sir. In fact, I was thinking what a graceful thing it would be if you would only double it—a mere trifle to a gentleman of your means. I have to use the most pitiful economy, I assure you."

"Oh, that's it, eh? Well, I can tell you how to increase it considerably. You have heard me speak of Edward Spriggs, of Birmingham?"

"Money-lender and skinflint? I have heard of him."

"Nonsense, Philip. He is a quite worthy as well as very wealthy man; and if he prefers to invest ready money by lending it, what of that? I lend my money, or some of it, sometimes."

"But not at cent. per cent."

"No matter. I don't propose that you shall borrow of him. He has an only child, a daughter, who will inherit all his vast property, just as you will mine."

"Does she shave sovereigns, father?"

"Phil, be kind enough not to indulge in chaff. I have seen her and talked with her. She is young, handsome, well educated, and has good taste—a Society gentlewoman with domestic tastes."

"Well, father, you are not so old, and, since you admire her so much, I see no reason why——"

"Stop your nonsense, and listen. Spriggs and I had a talk over it when I was in Birmingham, and we have concluded if you two agree to marry, to settle a hundred thousand pounds on you on your wedding-day. With what you have you'll do well enough for a while."

"But," demurred Philip, "I don't like Spriggs for a father-in-law."

"Stuff! you don't marry Spriggs."

"And the name! Think of it! Spr-r-iggs."

"What of that? With marriage the name is changed. I don't think she'll gain much by it—Spriggs—Briggs! Six of one and a half-dozen of the other."

"I'd like to oblige you, father. I suppose I must marry some day; but it will be someone I love; and then I insist of a woman on good family."

"Someone you love! How the dickens do you know you'll not love her till you see her? Good family! Of course you're entitled to that. The peerage of Britain is full of Viscount Briggses! The Briggses are found in the Almanac von Gotha among the earlier families.

"Your grandfather made sixty thousand pounds property in hides and tallow, and if he had not invested it in property, that multiplied itself more than tenfold before he died, I should have been in the same business to-day, and you in the office or warehouse. Family, indeed! You're a foolish boy, Philip, and your aunt's legacy has ruined you."

"I wish, sir, there were half a dozen more old aunts to continue my ruin in the same way. It is no use getting angry, father. You can't keep it up. I'll take to anything else you say—law, physic, or divinity; sell my horses, drop my club, read by the cubic foot, but to marry—excuse me."

"Look here, Phil," exclaimed the father, who by this time was very annoyed, "you never knew me to break my word. I merely ask you to marry for your own good. I point out a wife in every way suitable to you. Marry to please me, and I will not only start you fairly in life now, but leave you all I have when I am gone. Marry to suit some foolish fancy of your own and I'll—yes, I'll found an asylum for idiots. Now you understand me;" and Briggs marched off, leaving his son to his meditations.

"If I stay here," said Philip to himself, "father and I will quarrel. Better give the dear old gentleman a chance to cool off. I'll ruralise a little."

That afternoon Philip packed a portmanteau, and with a fishing rod and mineral hammer started off to Cornwall, where an old college friend of his had married and settled, one whom he had long promised to visit.

When he arrived there he learnt that Graham and his wife had gone to Ilfracombe for the season, and their servants with them, the house being in charge of a caretaker. Philip heard of good fishing in a stream four miles off, and concluded to try it. He found lodgings at a farmhouse near the place, owned by a man named Abraham Cooper.

His quarters were quite comfortable. The house was an old stone building, and roomy. He was assigned a chamber upstairs, looking out on a trimly-kept garden, in which old-fashioned flowers and herbs were grown side by side, and which sent a pleasant fragrance through the open window.

The room itself was adorned with pictures and nick-nacks showing feminine taste, and the bedstead was furnished with a hair mattress, and not the bag of feathers usually found in such places.

"Decidedly," said Philip to himself, "there is another female on the premises, something younger and possibly fairer than the substantial Dame Cooper, and with some refined taste."

But neither that day nor that week did he see any woman other than Mrs. Cooper or the servant. However, the cooking was good, the country air and his walks round about gave him an appetite, and he was content. He fished the stream closely, or rambled here and there, hammer in hand and bag at his side, or leant over the fences and talked with farmers about "crops" and the weather.

In a week's time the thing grew monotonous. The fish were not always inclined to bite, good specimens in quarries grew scarcer, and his stock of talk on farming was nearly

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exhausted. He began to think of going to Ilfracombe and hunting up Graham.

As he sat out in the garden one afternoon, debating the matter, a carriage was driven up the lane and stopped at the door. Lightly out stepped a young woman in a neat travelling dress, and the driver followed her with a large trunk, under which he staggered, burly as he was. Mrs. Cooper came from the kitchen, and exclaimed :

"Why, it's Gwenny, I declare !"

"You dear old aunty Ruth !" said the newcomer, hugging and kissing the farmer's wife. "I came to have a good time or a month."

"And so you shall, my dear," was the hearty reply. Philip took an ocular inventory of the looks, dress and manner of the newcomer as he took off his hat.

"A sweet face and graceful figure, and presentable anywhere," was his internal comment. "Here's luck. I shall not visit Ilfracombe yet."

"You have a lodger, aunty," said the girl, when upstairs with Mrs. Cooper.

"Yes, he's a Mr. Bee," said the other. "It don't look as if he had any call to work for his living, judging by his white hands and his luggage, and he's plenty of money."

"Bee ! Then he isn't a busy bee. But he's good-looking ; if he be agreeable, he'll do for a walking stick."

Mrs. Cooper's mistake as to Philip was natural enough. When she had asked his name on his coming he had said, in his airy way, "Philip B., at your service," and she had taken the sound of the initial for his surname.

After she had called him Mr. Bee several times Philip saw the blunder, smiled at it, and, as the naval officers say, "made it so" ; and when Gwenny came to the table she was introduced, "Miss Gwenny, Mr. B." As she was the niece, he concluded her name to be Cooper, but as the farmer addressed her as Miss Gwenny, and the farmer's wife as Gwenny, Philip chose the more respectful form of the two.

As Philip was a gallant young gentleman, and as the young lady was charming in manner, he naturally paid her much attention. When a young man and young woman are thrown together under such circumstances it is not unusual for a flirtation to follow. It is generally a foregone conclusion.

Philip soon learnt that "Gwenny" was the diminutive of Gwenllian, and not of the more stilted Gwendoline, which interested him. Philip's mother had been a Powel, with Welsh blood in her veins, and bore the same name.

This later Gwenllian was a mystery to him. For the niece of a rather coarse farmer—for Cooper, though a worthy man, was the reverse of refined—she displayed unquestionably gentle manners. Then she showed a fair knowledge of any subject touched upon in conversation.

What was she—a teacher ? She had not the look or the way of the schoolmistress. A governess ? Possibly. If so, in a good family. But her belongings were not of the second-hand kind.

Philip had a keen eye for female apparel. Her lace was of the newest ; her dresses were pretty in material and well fitting, though quiet in tone ; and though she displayed little in the way of jewellery, the stone that sparkled on the head of a pin was unmistakably a diamond. She had been well cultured, and every word and action showed a purity that fitted her name.

On the other hand, Philip was as much a mystery to the young girl. He was a gentleman beyond doubt. But what was he doing there, a man of culture, refinement, and aesthetic tastes, in that farmhouse ?

He had said nothing of the Grahams, which would have explained it. With a little affectation of cynicism, which did not ill become him, the man was as clear as water, frank as air. But why did he loiter there with no apparent purpose ?

The girl did not at first deem she was the attraction, but it came to her after five weeks, and she grew shy, and her shyness for the last week of her stay infected Philip, who became shy too, and lost all ease.

At length she announced to Mrs. Cooper that she had return home, and that her father, who was in London visiting a friend there, would come for her on the following day, and his friend with him. Philip heard this with a depression that told him that he had met his fate and that it lay in the power of this girl to make him happy or miserable for life.

All the night that followed Philip lay and tossed restlessly. He could not sleep. He felt that his father would be as good as his word, but he determined that he would win a wife then or never.

Towards morning he rose, dressed, and sat at the window until the sun showed itself. Then he slipped out of the house, and strolled towards a glen a few yards off, intending to remain out until he heard the breakfast bell.

It had been a favourite haunt of the two, and yet for the last few days both had avoided it. He made his way to a mossy rock which formed a sort of rustic seat, and there he saw—Gwenny.

"Miss Gwenllian !" he exclaimed.

She rose with rather an embarrassed air. Then she said calmly :

"I rested badly last night, Mr. Bee, and I came out at daybreak. I have been here ever since. The morning air seems to refresh me."

"I had the same experience," he said. "I have rested badly, or rather, have not rested at all. I——"

She looked up inquiringly, and at something she read in his eyes dropped her own, while a flush overspread her face and neck.

"Gwenny !" he said desperately, and took her hand. The fingers trembled in his, but were not withdrawn. "Gwenny darling," he said, "we are to part to-day. Do you know that I love you dearly ?"

"Do you—Philip ?" she murmured, but she did not look up.

"Gwenny," he said, "I have been sailing under false colours, but innocently enough. I have a way among my gentlemen friends of using my initials, and so I am called among them P. B., or Mr. B. When your aunt asked me my name, I said, 'Mr. B.,' and I did not care to undeceive her ; but I desire no concealment from you, unless you do not care for me. Then we will part as we met ; but I shall be a changed man. I shall never be able to forget you."

He waited for a reply. There was a slight tightening of her fingers on his as she half whispered :

"You must know that I care for you, Philip.'

"Now, darling," said the exultant Philip, "you must let me speak to your father to-day."

"I fear you may find him rather obstinate," she said. "He sets an undue store by his daughter."

"I can satisfy him of my position in society and that I am able to maintain you. I have means of my own, and have—well, I may say I had, great expectations ; but my father, who is very wealthy, has taken it into his head to choose a wife for me. I prefer to choose for myself. If you will be content to share what I have, Philip Briggs does not desire anything more."

"Briggs—Philip !" cried Gwenny, releasing herself from his grasp, and looking at him wonderingly. "Is your father's name John ?"

"Yes."

"And he lives in London ?"

"Yes."

Gwenny burst into a peal of silvery laughter.

"Do not feel vexed, Philip," she said at length. "I am only laughing at the similarity of our positions. My father chose a husband for me in the same way, and it was to escape discussion of the matter that I took these few weeks' rustication.

"Mrs. Cooper is my old nurse, and I have called her 'aunty' from the time I could toddle. She was married from our house. Her husband had very little money, and father bought them this farm and stocked it. But, oh, think, Philip dear, how your father and mine will chuckle ! You are Philip Briggs and I—I am Gwenllian Spriggs !"

Thos. D. English.

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Behind the Tamarisk Hedge.

HOW A QUARREL WAS MADE UP.

Summer.

A FRESH wind blowing from the east tempered the heat of the sun that beat down upon the wide-stretching sands.

It was low tide, and the tiny wavelets rippled at the edge of the brown sand in a faint white line, hardly discernible from where Jack Leslie lay dozing in the sunshine on the fringe of seaweed left by the last high tide.

A fishing boat with wide brown sails was tacking along close inland; children paddled, and dug, and played in little scattered groups dotted here and there, the little ones in the distance looking but tiny coloured specks dwarfed by the wide expanse of sand.

It was an ideal place to laze away long summer days. Not well enough known to be crowded, not near enough to a railway to be spoilt by excursionists. Niggers and a pier were unknown on that beach and the voices of the children at play were the only sounds that mingled with the cry of the sea-birds and the swish of the waves.

Jack Leslie had found a comfortable lodging with a coast-guard widow in the village, and after a swim in the blue waters was dozing away the morning hours on the sands. After the atmosphere of a stuffy city office the fresh salt air and feeling of space made Jack draw deep breaths of fresh air into his lungs, and feel thankful to be alive in such a sunny world.

For the first day at least Leslie felt that he did not want to speak to anyone. He wanted to be alone, free to do as he liked and watch the sea in its varying aspects of morning, afternoon, and evening. He wanted to get to know intimately this part of the shore which was quite new to him.

He could hardly make up his mind to turn his steps away from the sea and go in to his dinner, but that the strong salt air had given him a healthy appetite.

In the evening he strolled along the rough grass that grew to the edge of the low cliff—nowhere higher than a few feet—a little colony of tents were pitched here, and appeared to have a mushroom growth—as well as appearance—by the suddenness with which they appeared and, after a few days, disappeared.

Behind the tents a high tamarisk hedge waved its feathery branches.

It formed a square within the shelter of which two picturesque wooden bungalows lay hidden from the curious glance of chance passers-by.

Jack approached the archway cut in the thickness of the hedge, the rustic gate stood hospitably open, and he looked through, wondering who lived in the little green-and-white bungalow, where the parrot's cage hung and pink flowering tree geraniums making a vivid bit of colouring. Dainty little muslin curtains shaded the windows, and through the open doorway of the little sitting-room Jack caught a glimpse of the cosy interior.

The other bungalow was a complete contrast, evidently occupied by a family simply for their summer holiday; not a permanent "home," as the well-cared-for appearance of the green and white bungalow proclaimed it to be.

No one was about except a fat Basset puppy, who ruffled up an angry back and growled at the intruder standing in the shade of the tamarisk hedge. The growls of the puppy attracted a tiny sailor-clad boy, who trotted out and seized the pup by the collar.

Jack heard a sweet, clear voice from inside calling "Come in Sonnie, it's bed time. Leave the pup alone and come to mother."

The little chap looked regretfully at the puppy and the still, sunny garden outside and trotted back.

Jack did not like to remain longer; so filling a pipe, strolled on again to the next little village—a cluster of farms and an ugly slate-built coastguards' station. Leslie's curiosity was aroused concerning the occupants of the green and white bungalow behind the tamarisk hedge.

He could not resist putting a few questions to his landlady, and learnt from her that Danefield bungalow belonged to a Mrs. Lawrence, and that she lived there all the year round with her little boy, whom Jack had seen that evening.

"I don't rightly know, sir, if she's a widow, leastways we think she is, for although she wears no mourning, and has never said if she is a widow or not, we haven't none of us seen no Mr. Lawrence. Sometimes her sister stays with her, but as a rule she is alone with her old servant and her little Sonnie. It's a lonesome life for one so young and pretty as she is. Did you happen to see her as you passed, sir?"

"No, I didn't see her, but her bungalow looked so pretty and well kept that I felt sure its owner must be nice, and pretty too," added Jack inconsequently.

After his morning dip Jack strolled along the shore, and climbed up where the cliff was lowest opposite the bungalow.

On the step under the shade of the verandah sat a girl combing out her long curly hair still damp and clinging from the sea, on a lower step sat Sonnie, holding the brush and chattering away busily, his little sunburnt face upturned eagerly to the lovely one above him. As Jack's figure blocked out the view of the sea through the gap in the tamarisk hedge, the girl looked up and shook the sunny curls from her face. Seeing a stranger she rose hastily, and calling Sonnie went within.

Jack was forced to move on, reviling the ill-luck that had made the girl look up. If he had been curious about the occupants of the green-and-white bungalow by the sea before, he was doubly so now. Surely that could not be Mrs. Lawrence, that lovely girl with the sunny golden curls; it must be her sister, of whom his landlady had told him.

Later in the day he was buying stamps in the post-office when the fat Basset pup blundered into the shop, tugging little Sonnie after her, whose little strength was hardly enough to hold back the sturdy puppy.

Jack felt rather than saw the girl with the lovely hair enter, for he purposely looked away; he heard her ask for some bacon in a voice that he recognised at once as the one which had called Sonnie to come to "mother" the evening before.

"It must be Mrs. Lawrence," he said to himself, and began to turn over in his mind some plan by which he could obtain

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an introduction to her, as he knew no one as yet in the village who could introduce him.

But fortune capriciously favoured him sooner than he dared to hope.

The Basset pup, while Sonnie's attention had wandered to the contemplation of a bottle of sweets, had been sniffing at a row of rabbits hanging within reach, and now seized its opportunity and a rabbit and made off out of the shop with its prize.

The sudden tug at the chain upset Sonnie, and Leslie hurried to pick him up. In falling he had struck his head against a chair, and, notwithstanding manful efforts, the tears would come.

Jack lifted him up on to the counter, and hastily pulled out some pennies for sweets. The little chap's face brightened at once; he and his new friend began to seriously discuss the rival merits of butterscotch and chocolate. Mrs. Lawrence thanked Jack for his kindness, and the ice was broken.

The puppy was captured and brought back, and the trio left the shop together, Sonnie's little brown hand slipped confidingly into Jack's, and his little tongue wagged busily.

Quite naturally Jack walked up the village with the little boy and his mother. At the cross road he stopped, hoping that Mrs. Lawrence would ask him to come to the bungalow to tea; but Mrs. Lawrence had relapsed into silence, and was walking along abstractedly, her thoughts evidently far away. She put out her hand when Leslie wished her good-bye.

"Come and sail boats to-morrow with me, Mr. Leslie, do," pleaded Sonnie.

Jack lifted Sonnie on to the counter and he was soon made happy with butterscotch and chocolate.

His mother roused herself, and her deep blue eyes met Jack's for a moment as she said, "Do come and cheer our loneliness if you care to, Mr. Leslie. Sonnie often longs for a playfellow."

So it was as Sonnie's playfellow he was to come, mused Jack, as he went back to his lodgings to write his letters. Well, anyhow he was only too pleased to go just for the hope of seeing those blue eyes again and the sunshine glittering in the curls that clustered in fascinating rings under the sailor hat.

Mrs. Lawrence was lovely, the loveliest woman he had ever seen, Jack thought as he sat with an empty sheet of note paper before him, and gazed out of the window at the shocks of yellow corn standing in the opposite field. The corn reminded him of her hair, the sky of her blue eyes.

With an impatient sigh he took up his pen again, and forced himself to write a dry business letter. Then he wrote a letter to his greatest pal, Lawrie Fielding, and asked him to come down for a few days.

His letters finished, he strolled along the shore, and was rewarded by a glimpse of Mrs. Lawrence with a big holland apron on, watering the geraniums, which added so much to the appearance of her dainty little bungalow.

Sonnie and the Basset pup were racing after each other, the puppy giving tongue lustily, to Sonnie's great delight.

Passing again a little later everything was quiet, and Jack guessed that Sonnie was being put to bed. Leslie lay down on the coarse grass at the edge of the low cliff. Presently Mrs. Lawrence came down and strolled out on to the sands; she caught sight of Jack, and nodded pleasantly. He jumped up and joined her.

She seemed less absent-minded than when she had said good-bye to him that afternoon, and Jack soon found himself chatting away to her as if their acquaintance was of much longer duration than a few hours. "I have written to ask a great friend of mine to come down and stay for a few days, I am so delighted with this dear little place. I am sure that it is just the quiet little nook that Fielding would love too."

Mrs. Lawrence stumbled suddenly. Leslie involuntarily put his hand on her arm, and she recovered herself instantly.

"When is your friend coming?" she asked quietly.

"On Saturday if he can get away," replied Jack, hoping that she would ask them both to the bungalow on Sunday.

Lawrie Fielding arrived, and the first walk that Jack took him was along the cliff past the colony of tents to the little green-and-white bungalow behind the tamarisk hedge. They stopped at the gap, the rustic gates were closed, the parrot's cage was missing from its accustomed place, the blinds were down—without a doubt the bungalow was empty.

Jack Leslie could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes! When he had told Mrs. Lawrence Captain Fielding was coming on Saturday she had said nothing about leaving; surely if she had intended being away she would have said so, recent acquaintance though he was.

Captain Fielding was rather amused, and chaffed Jack about his beautiful widow who had left so suddenly. He had a bitter, sarcastic way of talking about matrimony, and told his friend that evidently the widow did not intend to risk matrimony a second time, and had gone away to escape the fascination of his good-looking friend.

Apparently Leslie took his chaff well; but he secretly worried and fretted over the unexplained absence of the woman with whom he had fallen in love.

He had met her constantly since their first unconventional introduction in the village shop, and each meeting had left him more deeply in love with beautiful Sybil Lawrence.

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than the last, and now she was gone, suddenly, without a word.

The suddenness of it hurt him. She might have told him. When would she be back? Barely ten days of his holiday remained.

Without Mrs. Lawrence the little seaside village became commonplace.

The little thatched cottages which had seemed so artistic when he arrived, looked more like the cardboard cottages of a stage village now, the shore was lonely, the whole place dull, and had it not been for Lawrie Fielding, Leslie felt he would have moved on to some crowded, fashionable seaside place in which to forget Sybil Lawrence's sweet blue eyes and sunny hair.

But Fielding liked the place, and was quite content to stay with Jack for the remainder of his holiday. All places were more or less alike to him since the sorrow which had spoilt his life two years ago.

Jack Leslie had not known him then and had often wondered what had made him so bitter in speaking of women. He knew that Fielding had been married, and supposed him to be a widower.

One evening as they sat outside in the dusk under the shade of the tamarisk hedge on the cliff, Fielding's usual reserve melted, and he offered for the first time during their friendship to tell Jack the story of the trouble which shadowed his life.

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and began.

"I fell in love with and married the prettiest girl I had ever seen, Jack. She had the sweetest nature and most lovable ways that you can imagine, and we were perfectly happy. We cared, or at least I should say I cared, for nothing in the world but my darling." Captain Fielding's voice was full of regret and bitterness, and he paused. Jack sat silent and waited for him to resume.

"My wife had a great friend, a girl whom she had known all her life. I never really liked her because it seemed to me that she made mischief between Sybil and me, but I was so devoted to my wife that I never could object to anything that seemed to please her and make her happy.

"Then this girl, I won't mention her name, began to drop little hints about a brother officer of mine who was with us a great deal, and whom Sybil had known several years longer than she had known me, in fact it was he who had introduced us to each other.

"The girl was so clever and instilled the poison into my mind so gradually that even now I cannot recall the exact moment when I began to suspect Sybil's most innocent act."

"But," interrupted Jack impetuously, "you surely didn't let that girl influence you against your wife, against the woman who was all the world to you?"

"Ah, I don't wonder at your indignation, old chap, of course I wouldn't without proofs had she been even cleverer than she was, but unfortunately there was plenty of proof in the shape of letters. Oh, Jack, I can hardly bear to remember those awful letters that have ruined my happiness.

"I have never felt the same since I read them. I can see Sybil now, she came into the room just as I finished reading the last; she had Baby Audrey in her arms. The little mite was crying, she was only two, and had fallen and knocked herself. Sybil was loving and kissing her. As she came in I started to my feet and held the letters out. 'God knows I don't want a scandal,' I cried, 'but if ever I see your face again don't hold me responsible for what I do.'

"She stood there, white to the lips with terror, holding her baby in her arms. I had never spoken a sharp word to her before, Jack, in all our married life, I swear. She tried to speak, to explain.

"Then drew herself up proudly and walked out of the room."

"What then?" asked Jack. "You gave her a chance to clear herself?"

"I have never seen her since. I went out of the house in a rage. When I returned she had gone, and she had taken little Audrey with her! On my writing-table on top of the fatal letters lay a tiny note from Sybil. 'You have broken my heart, Jack. Good-bye.' That was all, no attempt to explain, nothing more." He broke off.

"Give me a cigarette, Jack, if you have one. Now you know why I talk a little bitterly sometimes about matrimony."

"Do you know where she is now?" asked his friend, as he gave him his cigarette-case. "Don't think me inquisitive, but I am awfully interested."

"No, I haven't an idea. Sometimes I long to find her, to hold her in my arms again, and forgive and forget. I would have her back gladly, but what is the use? I couldn't make her happy now if I couldn't keep her love then. She could never have loved me, for those letters dated from before we were married until within a few weeks of the day that I read them. The man had been ordered abroad, he had just exchanged, and had left a fortnight before.

"No married woman who loved her husband as I believed, poor, deluded fool, that Sybil loved me could receive such letters. She was a bad lot, Jack, and when you've said that you've said all there is to say. Come, let's go along the sands before we turn in."

Captain Fielding and Mrs. Lawrence were standing very close together.

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Winter.

A white rime covered the tamarisk, outlining it with brilliant sparkles against the deep blue of the winter sky. The waves were dashing against the shingle and flinging it over the low cliff, strewing the coarse grass with stones from the sea-shore and trails of brown seaweed. It had been a week of storms, but to-day the wind had died down, and only the unrest of the sea told of the storms which had kept the inhabitants of the little village within doors for days, while the wind and hail battered and fought outside and swept in wild gusts across the level sands.

Jack Leslie and his friend, Lawrie Fielding, had just arrived by the morning train. They had wired but a few days before engaging the bungalow close to the little green and white one that belonged to Mrs. Lawrence.

The months which had passed since the summer, had not blotted out the recollection of that first week of Jack's holiday by the sea, which had been spent in growing friendship with beautiful Mrs. Lawrence. Leslie had had a longing ever since to return, and the brief holiday which Christmas brings, he resolved to spend at Saltleigh in the hope of seeing her again.

He had asked Lawrie Fielding to go with him, and having bought some fascinating clockwork toys for Sonnie, they journeyed down.

They could tell at once by the outside of the bungalow that Mrs. Lawrence was at home, for they heard Sonnie's voice, and someone opened the door to let out the Basset hound which Leslie gratefully recognised as the pup which had led to his first introduction to Mrs. Lawrence in the summer.

While Jack was arranging matters with the woman who was to "do" for them, Captain Fielding went off for a stroll to see what Saltleigh looked like in such different weather. Jack had his talk, unpacked and set out his photographs and books to give the little sitting-room a "homey" look and still Captain Fielding did not return.

"I wonder where he can have gone," he said to himself, and having found his pipe and tobacco, opened the door to go and meet him.

The fresh salt wind came in straight off the sea. A few steps out, and Jack stopped suddenly. In the little rustic summer-house in the most sheltered corner of the tamarisk inclosure stood Capt. Fielding holding Mrs. Lawrence in his arms, her pretty golden hair tossed by the breeze lay against his dark coat, and her sweet blue eyes which Jack had thought the loveliest in the world were gazing up into the dark passionate face above her. Leslie could not hear what they were saying, but as he looked the dark head bent towards the fair one, and all the misunderstanding, the trouble, the regret, were forgotten and forgiven in one long kiss.

With a smothered cry Jack went indoors and shut himself into his tiny bedroom. He spent a very bad quarter of an hour in there by himself until the hall door opening announced Capt. Fielding's return. The carefully cooked lunch was growing cold when Jack at last emerged from his room. Fielding's face was transformed, all the bitterness and cynicism were smoothed away, and his old happy expression had returned. It would have been difficult to find a more morose and woebegone object than the erstwhile jaunty Jack Leslie.

"Don't tell me, Lawrie," he said miserably. "I know, I guess, I saw you with her just now in the summer-house. what an ass I have been!"

"Why, my dear old chap, Mrs. Lawrence is charming, and blushed most becomingly when we told her you were down here too."

"Don't make fun of me Lawrie, by Jove," fiercely, "that's more than I can stand. I tell you I saw you just now in the summer-house," with a dignity born of despair.

Suddenly Fielding burst out laughing.

"And so you thought *that* was Mrs. Lawrence whom I was holding, that was her sister, my own dear wife, Sybil Fielding," with a proud, glad ring in his voice. Jack's face changed as if by magic.

"They are twin sisters," Capt. Fielding went on to explain; "both called Sybil, but Sybil Lawrence is a widow with one little boy Sonnie, and my wife was staying here with her when you arrived last summer. You happened to mention my name and she of course told her sister who persuaded her to leave at once in order to avoid me. Mrs. Lawrence went away with her, but I think," slyly, "that it was very reluctantly, Jack."

"I am awfully glad, old chap, that you two are to be happy again. I suppose, after all, it was all a mistake, wasn't it?"

"If I hadn't been such an impetuous, credulous fool, it would all have been cleared up long ago. That girl altered the date of those passionate love letters, they were written by Bingham to Sybil, but two years before we were engaged. What she must have gone through these last two years, poor darling, makes me miserable to think of. Take my advice, Jack, and don't listen to what any one says about *your* wife not even if they can prove it."

After lunch Lawrie Fielding insisted upon Jack going with him to Mrs. Lawrence's bungalow, and Jack feeling unaccountably nervous, went.

They had a merry Christmas Eve, little Audrey and Sonnie playing delightedly with the toys that Jack had brought.

When the evening came to an end Mrs. Fielding fetched a fur cape and strolled off with her husband along the cliff.

It was a starlit night, frosty and calm, the wind had completely died away, and the sea lay in the cold moonlight at rest.

As the others disappeared in the distance Jack turned to Sybil Lawrence and asked her to be his wife, he waited anxiously for her answer:

"Yes, Jack, I will," said Sybil softly. Outside the Christmas bells were ringing, "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men."

"You have indeed made my Christmas a happy one," whispered Jack, as he took her in his arms. **F. Lindsey.**

Judge: "How old are you, Miss?" Elderly Female: "I am— I am——" Judge: "Better hurry up; every moment makes it worse."

"We won't print any such stuff as that," said the editor loftily, as he handed back the manuscript. "Well, you needn't be so haughty about it," retorted the irregular contributor; "you're not the only one who won't print it."

Verses Will Win Gramophones.

It is quite the exception to find people who don't like music; there are many who are fond of it, but yet either cannot make it themselves or if they can are not able to afford to buy a piano or other musical instrument. To such, a Gramophone would be an inestimable boon. The only thing you have to do to get the sound is to put in the record of the song or piece you want to hear and then set the machine in motion.

Each Gramophone we are giving away is accompanied by two records, and is fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, which greatly increases the volume of sound.

You can win a Gramophone by writing on the back of a post-card the best four-lined verse you can descriptive of *Short Stories*. The words "Short Stories" must appear in one of the lines.

A Gramophone will be given to each of the ten readers who submit the best verses.

Post-cards only must be used, and should be addressed to the VERSE EDITOR, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., to arrive not later than first post on Tuesday, February 24th.

The Editor's decision is final, and competitors must only enter on that understanding

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Miss Yarwood's Special Providence.

The Love Story of a Struggling Artist.

THERE were odours of turpentine and hot paint upon the air when Nora thrust her curly head into Miss Yarwood's studio.

"Wh-ow!" she cried, "aren't you burnt up? What is it now?"

"It's pin trays—six of them! And I am too warm, but I wanted to dry the colour well; there's so little time."

"I wonder you don't die, Miss Alice! You are cooped up here from daylight until dark, and even after dark, now that so many orders are coming in. How late did you work last night?"

"Twelve," said Miss Yarwood, half apologetically. "But you don't know how thankful I am that I can do those Dresden designs at night! Look here; aren't these dainty? I'm going to fire them to-night"—and Miss Yarwood straightened her stiffened figure and led the way to a tall cabinet filled with odd bits of china, from among which she indicated one particular row of tiny cups and saucers.

"Oh, the dainty darlings!" cried the young girl, with positive rapture. "How you do them I can't even imagine. And will those black dots and scrolls be gold after the firing?"

"Gold as can be!" laughed the other. "They're an order for Kitty Birch; for a wedding present to her dearest friend."

"What will you get for them?" Nora asked suddenly.

Miss Yarwood hesitated a moment, and a little flame of colour shot into the pallor of her cheek as she replied:

"Thirty shillings."

"Apiece!"

"No, no—for all of them."

Nora stared blankly and then fairly shrieked:

"Only thirty shillings for the whole half-dozen? Why, you have worked for days on them, and—what did the plain china cost?"

"Half-a-crown apiece."

"That's fifteen shillings for the set. And how much gold have you used on them?"

"Not more than five shillings' worth, if that much," came the faint response.

"Then you'll get ten shillings for working two days and nights, spoiling your eyes, breaking your devoted back, ruining your health, and—and the firing to do. I forgot to count that and the gas. Miss Alice, my dear, you are an idiot! You make me absolutely furious!" and Nora stalked to the other side of the room and flounced angrily into a seat by the low window.

"Listen, dearie." Miss Alice spoke with a little deprecatory gesture. "It's Kitty's very, very dearest friend, and she did want to give her something charmingly pretty, and yet thirty shillings was all she could afford."

"Then why didn't she use up her own strength and nerves and eyesight instead of yours, in her investment? She can manage to wear beautiful clothes and warm furs and several hats a season, while you are going about in a cloak you've worn for five years—and even your best dress frayed at the edges."

"Now, Nora! I'm sure my cloak is still stylish and pretty, and I bound the frayed edges only last week, so the dress looks as good as new. I'm sure I always look nice."

"Nice!' You look like an angel!"—and impulsive Nora flung both arms about the little spinster and kissed her hot cheek. "But can't you come out, just for a minute, for a walk and a breath of fresh air?"

Miss Yarwood shook her head with a mock-woeful grimace.

"I must get the cream jug ready for the firing, and all the gold's to put on that vase yet. To-morrow's Sunday, dear; we'll have a long walk then, in the afternoon."

Nora sighed and left the room; but Miss Yarwood smiled as her fine brush trailed delicate lines of gold over the pale blossoms on the ivory-tinted cream jug.

"Nora doesn't realise how fortunate I am," she said. "I never had so many orders before."

Meanwhile Nora was freeing her mind to Cæsar, the huge mastiff, who stretched his great legs as he rose from the door-mat.

"She's killing herself, Cæsar, for five shillings a day. Come, sir, you need a run. We'll go out and get a bag of cool oranges for that hot little goose. There, now, one, two—run!" It was twilight and the street was still. "Nobody'll know we are school-teachers, Cæsar. This is glorious! Go it, I say—Oh! oh, dear!—gracious!—I beg your pardon. If it isn't Doctor Grimes!"

"Or what is left of him," that gentleman flustered. "Will you tell me, miss, what you mean by tilting headlong in this fashion at respectable old gentlemen?"

"If you please, sir, we were in a bit of a hurry going for oranges for Miss Alice."

"If she needs 'em that badly I think I'll turn back with you to see that you get a good sort. M—h—ah, how is Miss Alice to-day?"

"Cooked, sir."

"What?"

"She's being slowly roasted, I say, in that little studio of hers. I'd like to be her mother, Doctor Grimes, for about a year, till I could teach her some sense!"

"I have found Miss Yarwood a lady of extremely sound sense and good judgment," said Doctor Grimes, with dignity.

"Then you don't know her as well as I do," came the unabashed retort. "You don't know her business methods. She's doing charitable work for people who could buy her—house, lot, and all—and who call themselves her patrons! You don't know, perhaps, that she has her breakfast at six o'clock in the morning that she may lose no minute of precious daylight; that she gives her eyes and her strength and her real artistic talent to the graceless people of Birchwood for the munificent sum of five shillings a day."

"You don't mean it!" gasped the doctor.

"Indeed I do! And I want to fight somebody. She's almost ill, this minute; but she will tell me, smiling sweetly, that she must earn her bread and butter, and that she's so thankful she can!"

Doctor Grimes cleared his throat.

"I haven't been long in Birchwood," he said. "I fancied Miss Yarwood did her china painting mainly for amusement."

"Well, that's about all she gets out of it," said the girl, grimly; "but even amusements may be indulged in to excess. Oranges, yes—a dozen of the best."

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"And a couple of pounds of those Californian grapes," put in the doctor, pointing with his stick to the saw-dusty box over which luscious white clusters were hanging. "Well, well, well! There ought to be a guardian, I should say. She looks well enough to other people's needs. There was that Osgood family—shiftless things!—I first ran across her there——"

"That's where her muff went, because Mrs. Osgood's hands looked cold—big fat things!—and her own have frozen blue ever since. She never will learn any sense."

"Tut! tut! Miss Nora. No, you needn't say I sent the grapes—I shouldn't dare"—and the big doctor really looked alarmed. "But I hope she'll eat them."

"If she doesn't her lodger will," and Nora laughed mischievously.

She was still smiling, over thoughts all her own, when she looked into the studio again at tea time. Miss Yarwood dropped her brush for a moment, and looked knowingly at the rosy, girlish figure.

"I saw you, Nora, you rogue—both of you. And, my dear, there's the right sort of man; how different from those light creatures Billy Smith and Tom. Not that Billy and Tom aren't nice boys in their way, but the doctor is so fine and big and handsome! And I saw him look after you, Nora dear, as you came in at the gate, almost as if he would have to turn and follow."

"It's likely enough he wanted to," laughed the girl.

Miss Yarwood looked at her half wistfully.

"Don't take it too lightly, Nora, my big, happy girl. Love doesn't come to all lives—not such love as his would be. I tell you, he's a real nobleman, Nora."

"Too fat," commented Nora laconically.

Miss Yarwood looked aghast. Then she said with a little quiet dignity:

"He's a large man, not fat. We'll go to supper, Nora."

* * * * *

They had come back from their walk on Sunday afternoon, and if Miss Yarwood's hands were blue with cold her cheeks were pink enough, and her soft, brown eyes held warm lights in their depths.

"Wasn't it delightful?" she said, with a long-drawn breath as she sank into the chair Nora drew before the blazing coals. "I feel like another person. And how beautiful the fire is! Mary always looks after that. My life ought to be one long song of thanksgiving. A cosy home, my very own, a devoted servant, a friend—and what a friend you have been to me, Nora!"

She paused with a little choke in her voice, and Nora had not the heart to repeat aloud her running commentary:

"'A cosy home,' earned by her own hard struggles; 'a devoted servant,' at exorbitant wages a week; and 'a friend,' Nora, the lodger, who pays ten shillings for a one pound room and her board."

"It has always been like this, Nora, since I can first remember."

Miss Yarwood had thrown off her coat and was looking ruminantly into the coals.

Nora swung a low chair forward, and poked the fire a trifle viciously.

"I am tempted to tell you something I have never told a living soul!" cried Miss Yarwood, with a little start, turning the brown eyes full upon the beloved lodger. Her voice was low, as became the telling of a deep secret, but clear and sweet and alive with feeling. "It is this, Nora: That I believe myself to be, in a special sense, one favoured of Heaven—a charge of Providence. Other people have had terrible trials and troubles——"

"And so have you!" burst forth the girl impetuously.

Miss Yarwood turned meditative eyes upon her.

"Oh, yes, of course there have been clouds and rainy days, but God kept his sun shining steadily for me behind them. Always, I have been specially protected and guarded and shielded from harm. To-night, for very thankfulness, I can't be dumb. Let me tell you, Nora, I had a sweetheart once——"

Nora sat alert.

"I was very young. I hardly knew him, for he was a stranger in our town, but I loved him desperately—I think I really did. We were engaged to be married. My clothes were made—what pleasure I took in them! And the day fixed. But just a week before it, an officer came and—arrested James.

"Nora, that handsome young sweetheart of mine was as cold-blooded a villain as ever lived! He had robbed his own father, gambled away his money—I can't tell you all the story of his sins! What I want you to see is that Providence was watching over me to keep me from becoming the miserable wife of that wicked man.

"Of course it hurt for a long time. But after awhile I was helped past it till all the pain was gone, and in a strange, sweet way, it seemed to me that bitter experience helped me to appreciate the really grand, good man I later learnt to love."

"And he?" Miss Nora leant forward as she asked the question and held her breath.

"He taught me how truly fine and pure a man's life may be, how all-ennobling his love. I honoured him so entirely that when he afterwards found he had been mistaken in his love for me, I could only admire the consideration, the real nobility of character, that prompted him to frankly tell me so."

The girl by the fireside gave a little gulp and looked away; but if the faintest shadow crossed the fair face of the elder woman there lurked no trace of bitterness within it.

"I love children, Nora—you know that. And I used to dream day-dreams of babies lisping about my own knees, babies with Robert's fine, white brow, and Robert's clustering curls. But even this lack in my life is compensated to me. There isn't a child in this whole neighbourhood that doesn't love to come to Auntie Alice's. On all sides, you see, I find love and tenderness. And then this beautiful gift of mine! What if, like many a poor soul, I had to eke out a miserable existence with a poorly paid needle, or doing work too heavy for my strength?"

"Oh, you'd do it, and shout praises over your machine or your wash-tub."

Miss Yarwood laughed a little joyous laugh.

"What a tease you are, Nora. One would almost think you didn't believe in my talent or my—my secret."

"I'll tell you what I believe," said Nora seriously. "I believe you have the sunniest disposition a woman was ever blessed with!"

"Yes, I have that, too!" beamed Miss Yarwood, with the naïvete of a child. "There isn't anything a kindly Providence hasn't given me."

Nora looked at the re-bound best dress, at the thin little figure, the tired but smiling eyes, and forbore to speak.

"I wonder what she'd do with half the blessings most women have?" she thought.

* * * * *

It happened in the most curious way, just three nights later, that big Doctor Grimes, passing Miss Yarwood's cottage, stopped in the shadow of the fir tree to gaze in at the little studio; and at that same instant, Miss Yarwood

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leaning over her china kiln, more tired than ever, and just a little "shaky" from loss of sleep and appetite, suddenly "gave out" entirely and fell, tea-cups, pin-trays, and all, against the kiln, and on, in a heap of tinkling porcelain, to the floor.

Curiously, too, Doctor Grimes forgot all about his ridiculous shyness of the little woman, vaulted her fence (fir tree, too, he afterwards thought, so great had been his haste) and in half a flying minute reached her side, lifted her out of her pitiful ruins, and sat her bolt upright upon a chair.

She had not fainted—not she. She was only a trifle dazed, and "not very strong," as she explained. She felt there was some explanation called for, for there was absolutely no misunderstanding the fact that the big doctor, having sat her upon her chair, had shaken her soundly.

"'Not very strong,' indeed!" (Another shake.) "I have heard about it! Miss Nora says you need a guardian, and I am come to be he." His voice was harsh and angry.

"Don't you know, *know*, you are killing yourself?" Then it came over him suddenly just how pale and thin and pitifully small she looked, this misguided bread-winner, and he looked about wildly until his eye rested upon a cushion across in the little window seat. He strode after it; then he put it gently at the back of her head.

"I—did I—shake you, you frail little mite of a woman? I might have killed you; Heaven only knows how easily I could do it. And rather than hurt a hair of your head——"

He stopped and looked unsteadily at her, for his eyes were swimming in sudden tears. And Miss Alice felt a strange yearning in her heart towards this man whom she had selected to be dear Nora's lover.

"You didn't—shake me—very hard," she stammered. "I must have provoked you to it, falling clumsily, like that——"

He stopped her short.

"What sort of an old party do you think me, anyhow, Miss Alice? Would you believe a thing I told you as solemn truth?"

"Oh, I would!" she cried, looking steadily into the kind, grey eyes.

"Then please believe that I love you from my very heart, and that, old bachelor as I am I shall always be, unless you let me come as business manager of this firm. As Mrs. Grimes you may paint tea-cups for me alone, and I'll promise unbounded admiration and prompt pay. Will you be my wife, Alice, and let the love and care of a lifetime atone for the ugly gruffness I've shown you to-night?"

He was holding both her hands, and, kneeling there perilously on those broken bits of fine arts, could look straight into the big, brown eyes.

"I thought I had given all my heart to—to Robert—but that was long ago, and——"

"And now?"

"And now you—you remind me of him—in being so grand and good, I mean — so much so that I believe in time——"

"How much time?" cried this impatient lover. "Don't you know that since that first day in the leaky Osgood cottage I've thought of you day and night, and loved you until I've been a perfect old fool? How much time? Can't you love me in five minutes? Now?"

And the little woman, moved by some impulse, leant suddenly forward and tremulously kissed the grey-sprinkled hair of the doctor. That kiss installed the new business manager.

When Miss Nora came in five minutes later, two happier people she was sure she had never seen. But it was only to her pillow she confided, and in the dead of night, that not until she saw the big doctor's protecting arm about the little spinster did she take much stock in that "special Providence."

Maude Rittenhouse.

JOHN ATHERTON'S WOOING.

Proving the All-Powerfulness of Love.

They had reached the little gate which led to the home of Esther Bryant.

"Mr. Atherton, please don't say any more. I cannot bear it. You do not realise what you are saying. Please don't interrupt me, but help me to do my duty. I fully appreciate the honour you would confer on me as your wife, but I also realise the barriers that separate us, and which can never be broken.

"I did not dream that you would ever care for me in this way, and I only hope that you may in time know that I am in the right; and believe that it has also cost me something to speak in this way. Perhaps it is for the best that I am going to-morrow, so let us say 'Good-bye' as friends, and when we meet again let it be as friends."

She raised her eyes to his face, those sweet eyes so deeply, purely blue, and they met the sad gaze of his dark ones bent upon her. His voice was husky as he asked:

"Is this to be the end, Miss Bryant? Can I not persuade you to change that little word when I tell you how dark the future will be for me without you by my side? Why need you go miles away to earn your daily bread by teaching when I can make you so happy—that is, if you love me—and you do love me, don't you, Esther?"

"Oh, Mr. Atherton, don't ask me that! Don't make my duty any harder, nothing can make me change what I know is for the best. If we should never meet again——"

"Esther, we shall meet again. I can't say when or how, but I feel that some time in the future we shall be together. I can't urge you any more, but remember, I shall never give up hoping that some day you will return to the arms that will be waiting to receive you," and suddenly he clasped her to his heart and pressed the first lover's kiss on her sweet lips.

That was all, and as he turned away she entered the little home that was so lonely and which she was so soon to leave, the home where all her childhood and girlhood had been spent, and where the dear departed father had provided for all the wants and education of his only child.

John Atherton reached his home many hours later; a home so different from the other, where all was happiness and mirth, with girlish voices ringing through the spacious halls, and all the luxuries that heart could wish. But he saw in all this the cause of his loss—the barrier between them—and he knew that, though "years might come and years might go," no other woman could ever be his wife.

Seven years passed away, bringing many changes into the home of John Atherton. He saw his dear mother laid to rest, his sisters wedded and far away, and himself the master of the old manor and heir to the Atherton millions.

A cool day in the latter part of October a man sat idly and alone by the drawing-room window.

Suddenly he heard a light step in the hall and the swish of a woman's skirt at the door, and he arose and faced the intruder, but spoke not a word. A tall, glorious creature, with red-gold hair and violet eyes, came towards him, and holding out her slim white hand said softly: "Mr. Atherton, don't you know me?"

At that familiar voice the deep eyes were raised to her own, and in that one glance she knew it all—that, though he looked at her, he saw her not. He was blind.

"Esther," he cried, "have you come at last?" and he opened his arms and the bright head was lying on his breast.

It did not take long to tell of all that had passed since they parted; of his long illness and its terrible results and of her success in her field of labour.

But no longer was John Atherton's face sad, no longer did he shun his friends and acquaintances, for he had found his sight, and he saw not with his eyes but with the lips of the woman he loved—his wife

Cecil Winter.

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Why She Wanted to Marry.

Guardian: "Why should a rich and happily-situated young woman like you want to get married?" She: "I'm afraid of burglars."

Taking No Risks.

"I am not fond of the stage, Violet," said Augustus; "but I hear your father on the stairs, and I think I'd better go before the foot lights."

Very Little to Choose Between Them.

He (angrily): "You take me for a fool, don't you?" She: "No, I take you for a possible husband, but (dreamily) there's not much difference."

She Liked Married Life.

Friend: "Well, Ethel, how do you like married life?" Ethel (enthusiastically): "It's simply delightful. We've been married a week and have had eight quarrels, and I got the best of it every time."

Glad She Only Squeezed Through.

Professor (to a young lady student): "Your marks are very few, and you have only just passed." Young Lady: "Oh, I am so glad." Professor (surprised): "Why?" Young Lady: "I do so love a tight squeeze."

The Footprints Would Show.

"I'm afraid papa doesn't like you a bit, George," said the girl to her *fiancé*. He: "Well, what of it? I've got too much sand to be afraid of the old man." She (apprehensively): "Yes, but sand is just the stuff to make footprints in, George."

Mrs. Brown's Experiences.

Mr. Green (who has been listening to Mr. Brown's account of a trip round the coast): "And how did you like it, Mrs. Brown?" Mrs. Brown: "Well, I didn't see much of the scenery, but the cabin was very comfortable, and the stewardess a most sympathetic woman."

How He Got Out of It.

Frisky Spinster: "How many dances are you going to give me to-night, Captain Waxham?" Captain Waxham: "Oh, I'm so sorry, but there's not enough men, you know, and I've just been told by Mrs. Masham to dance with the girls who—a—who are not likely to get partners." (Asks the girl just behind him for three waltzes and a polka.)

Would He Return?

The parting was sad, the tears were bitter. Hide, sun, thy kindly face, and gather, ye storms, your blackest inky scroll! Tenderly kiss the pale wan cheeks; brush back the damp, clinging auburn locks from the pale, high brow which a fond mother's lips have kissed since infancy. Speak the last and parting words, the words which make us linger on their echoes. Say good-bye for aye; press the cold hand and watch his slow retreating form, which fades away for ever. He is going to play in his first football match!

What a Shame!

He: "That fellow over there cheated me out of a cool million." She: "How could that be?" He: "Wouldn't let me marry his daughter."

The Kind of Payment.

"Do you pay for poetry?" asked the pretty girl. "Y—yes," replied the editor with some hesitation. "What do you pay?" "Compliments."

Wise Tourists.

He: "And where are you going next?" She (Cook's tourist): "Milan." He: "Why, you are in Milan now." She: "Oh, are we? Well, then, Geneva."

Hard Work Steering!

"What is that place down there?" asked she (on her first voyage). "Why, that is the steerage," answered he. "And does it take all these people to make the boat go straight?"

Neither Was Correct.

"Which do you think is correct?" asked the studious young woman, "'I would rather go home,' or 'I had rather go home?'" "Neither," replied Mr. I. Nevergo; "I'd rather stay here."

It Made all the Difference.

Clara: "Why, Tony, do you have that candle up there on the electric light?" Tony: "Well, the electric light is, they say, equal to sixteen candles, but you have no idea what a difference the seventeenth makes."

Where He Had the Advantage.

"Janette, I'm afraid you are a vain little wife. You gaze into your mirror so much." "You oughtn't to blame me for that. I haven't your advantage." "What's that?" "You can see my face without looking into a mirror."

Papa Wanted Practice.

She: "And you say you would die for me?" Mr. Boresome: "A thousand times." She: "Would you mind doing it just once—straight away? You know papa has been appointed coroner, and he hasn't had any practice yet."

Looked Like a Proposal Soon.

Mother: "When do you suppose that young man who calls upon you will make known his intentions, Laura?" Laura: "I think he will propose pretty soon. Last evening he was very anxious to know whether I could dress on twenty pounds a year."

To Help His Memory.

Who should know a man's weakness if not his lawful wife? "What in the name of Jupiter have you sewn up all the pockets of my overcoat for?" asked Mr. Wilson. "My dear," said Mrs. Wilson, "I have an important letter to my milliner that I want you to post."

Where the Difference Lay.

He was going to propose to her, and he prefaced his proposal with the following conundrum: "Why," he asked, "is your house more notable than the Agricultural Hall, Islington?" "Is it so?" "It is." "In what respect?" "The Agricultural Hall contained only the World's Fair, but this house contains the world's fairest." His proposal was favourably received.

Getting His Own Back.

She had yawned, looked at the clock, pretended she was sleepy, and in other ways had given him to understand that it was time to go. He felt nettled on observing these signs of her desire to get rid of him, and determined to have revenge. "Won't you sing something for me?" he asked. "Sing at this time of night? Why didn't you ask me before? Why do you want me to sing now?" "Well—er, the fact is, I want to be reconciled to leaving you."

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OUR SPLENDID SERIAL.

THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY.

A Romance of To-day.

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

The Hall-porter's Doubts.

WHEN one o'clock came and Edith had not arrived, the three men waiting in the hotel made no further effort to conceal their anxiety. The impetuous Fairholme was eager to commence an immediate search of Marseilles, but Brett steadily adhered to his resolution not to stir from their sitting-room until either Miss Talbot came back in person, or it became quite certain that she was detained by some other influence than her own unfettered volition.

"It may be," he argued, "that she will require some action on our part the moment we see her, and nothing could be more stupid than for the three of us to be wandering about this great city hopelessly inquiring for a missing English lady, whilst she was impatiently awaiting our return in the knowledge that valuable time was being lost to no purpose. What is there to fear? Miss Talbot is absolutely unknown to all the parties concerned in the affair. Even if she attracted their attention, which is improbable, it is almost inconceivable that they should connect her with the search being made for them. The only risk she runs is that of insult by some semi-intoxicated reveller, and, even in a rowdy city like this, it must, indeed, be a strange locality in which she would be denied some protection. Of course I will be much relieved when Miss Talbot returns, but up to the present I see no reason for undue anxiety on our part. Indeed, we ought to congratulate ourselves on the fact that she deems it necessary to leave us for such a long period. The probability is that she is making highly important discoveries which may tend materially to reduce the area of inquiry."

With this view Talbot could not help concurring, so Fairholme had to content himself by smoking many cigarettes and walking uneasily about the room.

Sit down he could not, whilst any casual ring at the hotel door found him leaning over the balustrade of the inner court and listening intently for the first words of the new arrival.

But the Englishmen were not the only persons in the hotel that night whose composure was disturbed. Their extraordinary behaviour caused uneasiness to the manager and those members of his staff who remained on duty.

The facts disclosed by the hall-porter were certainly remarkable. Only one member of the party had behaved in a normal manner. Sir Hubert Fitzjames, soon after his arrival, went quietly to bed, but the hall-porter's report as to the conduct of the others was passing strange.

One of them, to his surprise, had rung up the Prefecture of Police in Paris on the telephone. The others were standing at the hotel door, gazing quietly enough at the passers-by, when suddenly about midnight much excitement arose amongst them. They conversed eagerly in their own tongue for a few moments, and the lady had rushed off down the street by herself, whilst her two companions ran with equal precipitancy to join the third in the sitting-room they had engaged, and there they were still seated in moody expectancy, apparently watching for some dramatic event to happen.

It was time that all good people were in bed. But it was hopeless to approach such lunatics with questions, for they were English, and no decent Frenchman could possibly hope to understand their actions or motives.

It was satisfactory that they could speak French well; therefore the manager counselled the hall-porter to exhibit patience and prudence. Moreover, milords upstairs would be sure to recompense him for an enforced vigil by a liberal tip.

At last when even the Cannebière was empty, and when the latest café had closed its doors and the final tramcar had wearily jingled its way up the hill towards a distant suburb, the electric bell jangled a noisy summons to the front door. It produced the hall-porter and Fairholme with remarkable celerity.

The Frenchman cautiously opened the door and saw outside a muffled-up female who eagerly demanded admittance. He knew by her accent that she was not a Marseillaise, but the shawl that covered her head and shoulders showed that she belonged to the working classes.

"Whom do you wish to see at this hour?" he gruffly demanded.

"I live here," said Edith. "I came here to-night with my brother from Paris. Please let me in at once."

In her excitement and breathlessness, for she had hurried at top speed from the harbour, Edith forgot that the homely garment she adopted as a disguise effectually cloaked her from the recognition of the hall-porter as from all others.

Moreover her French accent was too good. It deceived the man even more effectually than did the shawl.

"Oh, really now," he said, "this is for laughter! A woman like you staying at the hotel! Be off, or I will call a gendarme."

In his amazement at her demand he had not heard Fairholme's rapid approach behind him. He was now swung unceremoniously out of the way and the earl jumped forward to seize Edith in his arms.

"My darling girl," he cried "where have you been? We almost gave you up for lost. Where is your hat? Where did you get that shawl?" And all the time he was hugging her so fiercely that it was absolutely impossible for her to say a single word. At length she disengaged herself.

"Don't be so ridiculous," she said, "but let me come in and close the door. The hall-porter will think we are cracked."

She summarised the hall-porter's sentiments most accurately. He explained the transaction to the manager with most eloquent pantomime, and the two marvelled greatly at the weird proceedings of their strange guests.

"Ah," said the manager at length, "now that mademoiselle has returned, perhaps they will go to bed."

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At this instant Brett's voice was heard upon the stairs. He wanted the telephone again.

Edith had rapidly detailed her adventures to her astonished auditors, and Brett seemed to resolve upon some plan of action with the lightning rapidity peculiar to him at once.

Owing to the late hour he got through to Paris without much difficulty, and then he returned to the sitting-room, where Edith was rehearsing in greater detail all that had happened since she left them at the hotel door. Brett explained to his companions the motives of his second telephonic message.

"I am convinced," he said, "that Grosjean is in communication with his daughter. For this reason I do not wish the police to put in an appearance at the Café Noir until to-morrow night, or rather to-night, for we have long entered upon another day. I wished to have a reasonable time for quiet inquiry at Marseilles before mademoiselle could be apprised of our presence here. Miss Talbot's remarkable discovery has, however, wholly changed my plans. Mlle. Beaucaire and her lover have set off for some unknown destination, and the best chance we have of discovering it is to secure the immediate arrest of her father. Possibly, being taken by surprise at this hour of the morning, some document may be found upon him which will reveal his daughter's destination. It occurs to me that she half expected him to arrive by a late train. Again, when the fishing-smack puts into port, the girl will probably adopt some method of communicating with him, and that communication must come into our hands, not into his. So I have telephoned the police officials in Paris to raid the Cabaret Noir forthwith, and it is probable that they may report developments within the next two or three hours."

"Is there no chance of your discovering the whereabouts of that fishing smack?" said Fairholme.

"In what way?" demanded Brett.

"Well, this is a big port you know, and there are always tugs knocking about with steam up, on the off-chance of their services being required. Isn't it possible to charter a steam-boat and set off after the smack?"

"I do not think so," said Brett. "I imagine it would be wasted effort. By this time the *Belles Sœurs* is well out to sea. She can go in a dozen different directions. She may beat along the coast towards Toulon and the Riviera. She can make towards Corsica, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands, Spain, or the mouth of the Rhone. She will certainly not show any lights, and I personally feel that although there is, perhaps, a thousand to one chance we might fall in with her, it will be far better for our purpose to remain quietly here and await developments in Paris."

"Anyhow," remarked Fairholme, convinced that his proposal was useless, "it will be an easy matter for the authorities to ascertain the port that she arrives at."

Brett shook his head dubiously.

"I have my doubts on that point," he said. "The man who has thus far kept himself so easily ahead of all pursuers, and exhibited such a wealth of resource in his methods, may well be trusted to cover up his tracks effectually. There is even a possibility that the *Belles Sœurs* will never be seen again, and that her number will long remain vacant on the shipping register of Marseilles. However, we shall see."

"Then, Mr. Brett," put in Edith quietly, with a tired smile, "I suppose we may go to bed?"

"Most certainly, Miss Talbot. You have earned your rest more than any of us to-night," he answered.

He held out his hand to wish her good-night, but she demanded with some surprise, "What are you going to do? Surely you want some sleep?"

"I will remain here," he said. "I have bribed the hall-porter to keep awake, and I may be wanted on the telephone at any moment."

"Then I will stop with you," cried Fairholme.

"And I, too," chimed in Talbot.

"You will do nothing of the sort," he answered with pleasant insistence. "You will just be off, both of you, and get some hours of sound sleep. You may need all your

RENEWAL OF YOUTHFUL GRACE

BY THE

"RUSSELL" TREATMENT.

To those persons, especially, who are able to boast of "good looks," there can be nothing more vexatious than the sudden development of stoutness which too frequently surprises the man or woman approaching middle age. Diet themselves as they may, the tendency to "put on flesh" is still manifest, with, sometimes, a detrimental effect upon the general health. This is the experience of thousands who, in their earlier years, have possessed an elegant figure and unbounded energy, physical and mental. When this objectionable fat-formation persists there are many who, with a sigh of despair, put it down as "constitutional." Others fly to exhausting and debilitating drugs and "systems" which, when they effect any reduction at all, do it at the expense of strength and vitality. There is no cause to despair; there is no need for strength-sapping remedies. The well-known "Russell" treatment for the permanent cure of corpulency is founded on the principle that healthy, muscular tissue should be formed in place of the mass of useless adipose which it gradually eliminates from the system. Hence the welcome return to youthful grace and symmetry is always accompanied by a corresponding return to youthful vitality and good spirits—a rejuvenescence of both body and brain. The originator of this wonderfully efficacious treatment is the author of the standard work on the causes and the cure of stoutness, and we most sincerely recommend our stout readers to consult its pages, which teem with useful hints and information. To procure a copy of * "Corpulency and the Cure," they must send three penny stamps to the author, Mr. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., when they will receive the book by return under private envelope. There can be no doubt about the unique efficacy of the "Russell" treatment. If there were, that doubt would be quickly removed by the thousands of grateful letters from the author's patients. Extracts from this interesting and voluminous correspondence are given in "Corpulency and the Cure," and nothing could be more convincing. Mr. Russell also prints the recipe of the liquid vegetable tonic mixture upon which he chiefly relies for the permanent cure of obesity. By this it will be seen that the ingredients are entirely vegetable, and free from the slightest suspicion of anything harmful or disagreeable. There is indeed nothing unpleasant about the "Russell" régime, which calls for no unreasonable dietary restrictions, no violent purgative drugs, and no sweating exercises. In conclusion, let us note that the reduction of fatty matter brought about by the "Russell" treatment varies from ½lb. to 2lb. a day, commencing within the twenty-four hours following the first steps in the cure. The reduction goes on steadily, and surely, and pleasantly until the proper dimensions are reached, when the treatment may cease. There is little fear of the recurrence of corpulency if the patient uses ordinary prudence. No person with a tendency to fatness should omit to send for Mr. Russell's admirable book.

* *A copy of "Corpulency and the Cure" will be sent under plain sealed envelope to all readers of "Short Stories" who will forward their address, with three penny stamps, to the author, F. CECIL RUSSELL, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. All Correspondence strictly confidential.*

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energy to-morrow. Do not be afraid. I will arouse you if anything dramatic should happen."

Some Old Acquaintances.

Left to himself, Brett again interviewed the hall-porter and returned to the sitting-room, where he disposed himself for a nap on the sofa. Like all men who possess the faculty of concentrated thought, he also cultivated the power of dismissing a perplexing problem from his mind until it became necessary to consider it afresh in the light of further knowledge.

Within five minutes he was sound asleep.

At length he awoke with a start. He was stiff with cold, for the fire had gone out, and the tiny gas jet he had left burning was not sufficient to warm the room. He sprang to his feet and looked at his watch. It was half-past six.

"Surely," he cried, "there must have been a message from Paris long before this!"

He ran downstairs, encountering on his way some of the hotel servants, who even thus early had commenced work, for your industrious Frenchman is no laggard in the morning. Going to the hall-porter's office he found that functionary snoring peacefully. The poor fellow was evidently tired out, and twenty telephone bells might have jangled in his ears without waking him.

So, for the third time, Brett rang up the exchange to get in touch with Paris. As he had anticipated, he quickly learnt that the prefecture had endeavoured to get through to him about 4.30 a.m., but the operators were unable to obtain any answer.

"I can hardly blame the man," he said to himself, "for I was just as tired as he."

The intimation he received from the prefecture was startling enough.

In accordance with his instructions a number of detectives had raided the Cabaret Noir soon after three o'clock. They found the place in possession of a waiter and a couple of female servants. Grosjean had quitted the house the previous evening, and, most astounding fact of all, with him were three Turks.

Neither the waiter nor the domestics could give any information whatever concerning the hidden room. They knew of its existence, but none of them had ever seen it, and the place was generally regarded as a sort of cellar for the reception of lumber.

The police forced a padlock which guarded its trap-door, and found to their surprise that the place was much more spacious than they anticipated. It really contained two apartments, one of which was so firmly secured that it had hiterto resisted all their efforts to open it. The other was a sort of bed-sitting-room, and it had recently been occupied. From various indications they came to the conclusion that its latest tenants were Hussein ul Mulk and his confederates.

Judging from the fact that these gentry had quietly left the café in Grosjean's company about half-past seven the previous evening, they were not in confinement against their will. In fact, the police theory was that this secret chamber provided a safe retreat for any person who desired complete seclusion other than that provided by the authorities.

"It is assumed," said the officer who communicated this bewildering information to Brett, "that the locked room contains a quantity of stolen goods. The police remain in charge of the café, and when the necessary workmen have been obtained this morning the door will be forced. We will at once let you know the result of our further investigations."

"But what about Grosjean and the Turks? Surely Paris cannot again have swallowed them up?" inquired Brett.

"Every effort is being made to trace their whereabouts," was the reply, "but you must remember, monsieur, that they had many hours start of the police, and that this period of the day is the most difficult of the twenty-four hours in which to make successful inquiries. You may rest assured that the moment we receive even the slightest clue we will ring you up, provided, that is, you arrange for someone at your end to answer the telephone."

"Oh," said Brett with a laugh, "there is little fear of further delay in that respect. It will be daylight in another hour, and the servants are already busy about the place."

He rang off and then darted back to his sitting-room to consult a time-table, for the thought came to him like lightning that Grosjean and the Turks had quitted the café in order to reach Marseilles.

He could not yet explain this strange alliance. It was impossible to believe that the innkeeper would betray his daughter to serve the ends of a political party. No; there must be some other explanation which the future alone could reveal.

He well knew that the last thought likely to occur to the Paris police would be to suspect the missing men of any desire to reach the south coast. It was with an almost feverish anxiety that he scrutinised the pages of the Indicateur des Chemins de Fer, and he heaved a sigh of profound relief when he discovered that the first train Grosjean and the Turks could catch left Paris the previous evening at 8.40 p.m., and was not due at Marseilles until 8.59 that morning.

It was now close on seven o'clock, so he went to his bedroom, effected some much-needed changes in his personal appearance and then consumed an early breakfast of coffee and rolls.

At half-past eight he called a carriage and was driven to the railway station, where, punctual to the minute, the Paris train arrived.

Brett managed to secure a favourable point, whence he could observe the passengers without being seen, for on the platform were stacked hundreds of baskets of fruit and vegetables which had arrived by a local train.

There were not many passengers in the express, and among the first to alight were Grosjean and the three Turks—Hussein ul Mulk and the two others he had seen in the Rue Barbette.

It would be idle to deny that the barrister experienced a thrill of satisfaction at his own shrewdness, and he smiled as he realised the consternation of the Paris commissary when informed that he had so easily allowed the rogues to slip out of the net.

The travellers were evidently tired after a sleepless journey. Grosjean, being a fat man, had wobbled about a great deal during the night. He much needed the restorative effect of a comfortable bed; whilst the Turks, though younger and more active, also showed signs of fatigue, for this long journey had to them merely served as a sequel to many hours of detention in an ill-ventilated apartment.

So that they paid not the slightest heed to their whereabouts, save in so far as to eye with suspicion a harmless gendarme who happened to be on the platform.

The policeman of course, took no notice of them whatever. Grosjean was to him merely a typical Frenchman, whilst persons of dark complexion and Moorish appearance are everyday sights in the streets of Marseilles.

A diminutive railway porter loitered near Brett in the conceit that perhaps this well-dressed stranger might have felonious designs on the oranges and cabbages. His intense joy may therefore be pictured when the barrister beckoned to him, placed a gold piece in his hand, and said—

"You see those Turks there. Go after them and find out where they are going to. They are sure to take a carriage as their luggage appears to be somewhat heavy."

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The man darted off, secure in the belief that no one who could afford to give away twenty francs for such trivial information would be likely to pocket a cauliflower. In half a minute he returned.

"They have all driven off together, monsieur," he announced eagerly, "and the French gentleman first of all inquired of the driver how much he would charge to take them to the Jolies Femmes. Two francs was the fare, and this was agreeable, so they have gone there."

"I hope, in this instance," said Brett gravely, "that the Jolies Femmes is the name of a hotel."

"But certainly," replied the porter, elevating his eyebrows; "what else could it be?"

He meditated upon this question for five minutes after Brett's departure, and then an idea struck him.

"Ah," he cried, slapping his thigh with a grin, "he is a droll dog, that Englishman."

Brett, secure in the knowledge that his quarry had been located, drove back to his hostelry. He found Edith, Fairholme, and Talbot just sitting down to breakfast. He joined them, and had barely communicated his startling intelligence when Sir Hubert Fitzjames put in an appearance.

"Dear me," said the genial old soldier, smiling pleasantly at the assembled party. "I see you are all nearly as lazy as I have been myself. I hope you slept well and enjoyed a quiet night."

The burst of merriment which greeted this remark, not only amazed the worthy baronet, but startled the other guests in the dining-room.

"That is a strange thing," whispered a Frenchman to his wife. "I thought the English never laughed!"

The Yacht *Blue-Bell*.

After breakfast the party adjourned to their sitting-room, and there Brett detailed his immediate plan of action.

"The first point to determine is an important one," he said. "Which of you three—Sir Hubert Fitzjames, Talbot, or Fairholme—looks most like a Frenchman?"

The trio at once began to scrutinise each other carefully, to Edith's intense amusement.

"I am afraid, uncle," she laughed, "we must rule you out at once. You have 'British Major-General, late Indian Army' stamped so plainly upon you that here in Marseilles, a port accustomed to the weekly transit of P. and O. passengers, the smallest child could not fail to identify you. And as for you, Bobby! Good gracious! You are painfully Anglo-Saxon. I am afraid, Jack, that we must decide against you. That is to say, I suppose it hurts your vanity to be taken for a Frenchman, but you must not forget that Mademoiselle Beaucaire thought you were good-looking, and, I suppose she adopts Parisian standards."

Jack was amused by his sister's raillery.

"It is gratifying to find," he said, "that there are some handsome Frenchmen. But may I ask, Brett, why you wish one of us to haul down the British flag?"

"Because it is necessary that someone should keep a close eye upon Grosjean and the Turks. As a matter of fact, Miss Talbot is doubly right. Sir Hubert Fitzjames might possibly be made up to represent a retired French officer, but it is essential that he should speak French well."

"Then," cried Sir Hubert decisively, "I am out of court, because my French is weak, and I always want to go off into Hindustani whenever I open my mouth. Why, even this morning, when I rang for my hot water, I said to the waiter, '*Gurrum pani lao.*' I am sure he thought I was swearing at him."

"Very well," concurred the barrister, "it comes back to you, Talbot, and I regret to inform you that for the next few hours you must be content with the inferior cooking and accommodation of the Jolies Femmes Hotel. If you will come out with me now I will get you rigged up in a cheap French suit. That, and a supply of bad cigarettes, will provide a sufficient disguise for your purpose. You must pack a few belongings in a green tin box and betake yourself

13 Weeks in Hospital.

APPARENTLY NO HOPE OF A CURE

YET BILE BEANS MADE HER WELL.

GALLSTONES, LIVER DISORDER, AND BILIOUSNESS ROUTED.

After suffering for many years trying scores of prescriptions, passing through the hands of a succession of doctors, and being an in-patient at St. George's Hospital, London, for thirteen weeks, all without the slightest apparent benefit, Mrs. Mary Owen, of Siren House, Towyn, (Merionethshire), has been cured by Chas. Forde's Bile Beans. Here is her story:

"For many years I endured agony from biliousness, indigestion, and jaundice. My liver was completely out of order, and my strength failed at last completely.

"My doctor then told me that I had gallstones, and that a surgical operation was necessary if ever I wished to get better. Well, I went to St. George's Hospital, London, for the operation, but they put me under special treatment instead of operating, and I had to stay there for thirteen weeks. To my chagrin I got no benefit, and came from the hospital as bad as I went. All this

time the pains in my chest, especially after taking any food, were terrible. The jaundice had increased until I was an abominable colour, and I was in ceaseless agony all over my right side with pain from the liver. The doctor who then attended me gave me injections of morphia, as the only means of giving me relief from pain. In March last a gentleman whom I had known for some years told me that Chas. Forde's Bile Beans had done him a lot of good. His enthusiasm led me to try them.

"The first few doses made me feel a little better, and I determined to persevere. The improvement thus begun continued from day to day. I had not long been taking Bile Beans before I began to have a good appetite. I grew stronger and found the pains of indigestion less frequent, until they ceased altogether.

"The liver complaint and jaundice also disappeared from my system and the nasty bilious feelings left me. In the end Bile Beans cured me completely, and I have since enjoyed the best of health."

All sufferers from liver troubles, anæmia, rheumatism, debility, headache, constipation, piles, and female ailments who try Bile Beans will find in them a cure. You'll get them from any chemist at 1/1½ or 2/9 per box, or post free by sending prices to the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Red Cross Street, London, E.C.

to the Jolies Femmes. Do not make any inquiries about Grosjean. Simply keep an eye on him."

"But what about the Turks?" said Talbot. "Perhaps two of these scoundrels may be the identical pair who accompanied Dubois to Albert Gate. It is possible that they may recognise me at once."

"No," said Brett decisively. "This is a different gang. The two men who committed the murders never came to Paris. Dubois would not hear of it, I am certain. If you act with discretion, I am sure they will never suspect you."

"Can't you find me a job?" demanded Fairholme.

"Yes, a most pleasant one. It will be your duty to accompany Miss Talbot and Sir Hubert, and show them the sights of Marseilles. I will meet you here at luncheon, but we probably cannot see Mr. Talbot again until late to-night, when he will have an opportunity to come here quietly and detail the results of his observations. Of course," he added, addressing the young man directly, "if anything important happens during the day you know where to find me, either personally or by messenger."

It was natural that Edith's first steps with her lover and uncle would tend towards the scene of her overnight adventure.

But Miss Talbot was a clear-headed girl and took no risks. She knew well that in a chance encounter the sharp eyes of Marie and Eugenie might pick her out unless she was to some extent shrouded from observation.

So she donned a large Paris hat and a smart costume, which, with the addition of a thick veil, rendered her very unlike the girl who twelve hours earlier was pursuing a recalcitrant lover.

Secure in the changed appearance effected by these garments, and especially in the escort of two such English-looking persons as Lord Fairholme and Sir Hubert Fitzjames, she walked with them down the Cannebière and on the quay. She showed them the street up which she pursued Mlle. Beaucaire, and the point on the wharf whence the fishing smack took her departure into the unknown.

Then they strolled back around the harbour, still pursuing the track of Edith's midnight wanderings, when Fairholme suddenly whistled with amazement.

"By jove, look there!" he cried. "That's a piece of luck."

He pointed to the upper part of the basin, in which a number of smart yachts were anchored side by side. Marseilles is a natural point of departure for Mediterranean tours, and many yacht-owners send their vessels there to be coaled and stored for projected trips.

"What is it?" queried Edith, when she could see nothing in the locality indicated save the vessels and the small expanse of water dancing in the rays of a bright sun.

"The very best thing that could have happened. There is Daubeney's yacht, the *Blue-Bell*."

"Yes. So I see. It would be charming if we had time to go for a run along the Riviera, but I am afraid, whilst Mr. Brett controls our energies, amusement of that sort will be out of our reach."

"Not a bit of it. You do not see my point, Edith. Daubeney is a first-rate chap and a thorough sportsman. Suppose it becomes necessary for us to follow up Dubois and his fishing-smack, and we let Daubeney into the know. The *Blue-Bell* would pursue the *Belles Sœurs* to China. He would ask no better fun. I tell you that Brett will be delighted when he hears of it."

"Yes, dear, but we do not even know that Mr. Daubeney is in Marseilles."

"Let us go and see. It doesn't matter a pin anyhow, because a telegram from me to him would place the yacht at our disposal, and he would join us by express at the first possible stopping place. You do not know what a good chap Daubeney is."

"No," said Edith shortly. "He is evidently a most useful acquaintance."

It is a most curious fact that young ladies in the engaged stage regard their *fiancée's* male friends with extreme suspicion and the more enthusiastic the man, the more suspicious the woman.

Fairholme, sublimely unconscious of this feminine weakness, continued to dilate upon the superlative excellencies of Daubeney until they reached the yacht itself.

A smartly attired sailor was pretending to find some work in carefully uncoiling a rope which did not satisfy his critical eye. Before Fairholme could hail the man, a rotund form, incased in many yards of blue serge, surmounted by a jolly-looking face on top of which was perched an absurdly small yachting cap, emerged from the companion.

"Why, there he is," shouted the earl. "Halloa, Daubeney! Yoicks! Tally-ho!"

The person addressed in this startling manner stopped as though he had been shot. He gazed up at the sky and then gravely surveyed the gilded statue that surmounts the picturesque church of Notre Dame de la Garde.

"Here I am, you idiot," continued Fairholme. "I am not in a balloon. I am on the quay. Come here quick. I want to introduce you to Edith and Sir Hubert."

Luckily Miss Talbot's dark doubts had vanished after one keen glance at Daubeney. He was eminently a safe friend for her future husband. Such a fat and hail-fellow-well-met individual could not possibly harbour guile. So she passed over without reference the extent of Daubeney's acquaintance concerning herself, implied by the use of her Christian name. Indeed, was there not a compliment in Fairholme's unconscious outspokenness? If he only discussed her charms with Daubeney then Daubeney was a man to be cultivated.

The meeting on the quay was hearty in the extreme, and the Honourable James Daubeney further ingratiated himself by saying: "Even if Lord Fairholme had not told me who you were, Miss Talbot, I should have known you at once."

"That would be very clever of you," purred Edith.

"Oh, no, there is nothing remarkable in the fact, I assure you. He always sat in his chambers so that he could look at your photograph, and as, in addition to that speaking likeness, I know the colour of your hair, your eyes, I could not be mistaken."

Miss Talbot thought Mr. Daubeney rather curious. But still he was very nice, and unquestionably the services of the *Blue-Bell* might be more than useful.

So she was graciousness personified in her manner, and promptly determined to invite him to luncheon, thinking that the chance direction of their conversation with Mr. Brett might lead towards the use of the yacht being hinted at.

But she counted without Fairholme. The latter slapped his heavy friend on the back.

"Look here, old chap, are you fixed up for a cruise? Plenty of coal, champagne, and all that sort of thing?"

"Loaded to the gunwales."

"That's all right, because we may want the *Blue-Bell* for a month or so."

"There she is," said Daubeney, "fit to go anywhere and do anything."

(*Continued on page 254.*)

R. NORMAN SILVER'S GREAT NEW SERIAL STORY STARTS THE WEEK AFTER NEXT.

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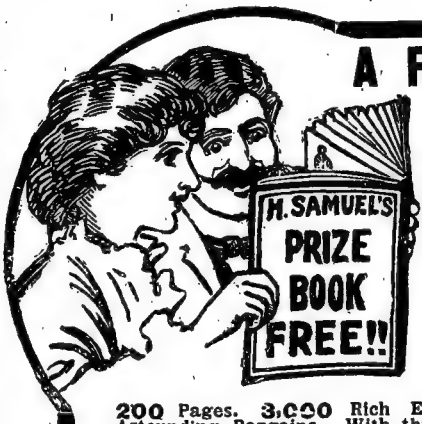
DR. JAMES WILLIAM KIDD.

able with the aid of a mysterious compound, known only to himself, produced as a result of the years he has spent in searching for this precious life-giving boon, to cure any and every disease that is known to the human body. There is no doubt of the doctor's earnestness in making his claim and the remarkable cures that he is daily effecting seem to bear him out very strongly. His theory which he advances is one of reason and based on sound experience in a medical practice of many years. It costs nothing to try his remarkable "Elixir of Life," as he calls it, for he sends it free, to anyone who is a sufferer, in sufficient quantities to convince of its ability to cure, so there is absolutely no risk to run. Some of the cures cited are very remarkable, and but for reliable witnesses would hardly be credited. The lame have thrown away crutches and walked about after two or three trials of the remedy. The sick, given up by home doctors, have been restored to their families and friends in perfect health. Rheumatism, neuralgia, stomach, heart, liver, kidney, blood and skin diseases and bladder troubles disappear as by magic. Headaches, backaches, nervousness, fevers, consumption, coughs, colds, asthma, catarrh, bronchitis, and all affections of the throat, lungs or any vital organs are easily overcome in a space of time that is simply marvellous.

Partial paralysis, locomotor ataxia, dropsy, gout, scrofula, are quickly and permanently removed. It purifies the entire system, blood and tissues, restores normal nerve power, circulation and a state of perfect health is produced at once. To the doctor all systems are alike and equally affected by this great "Elixir of Life." Send for the remedy to-day. It is free to every sufferer. State what you want to be cured of and the sure remedy for it will be sent you free by return mail.

Remember a letter to America from the British Isles requires 2½d. postage. Write your name very plainly, and be sure to give your full address, so there can be no mistake in delivery.



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The Chateau d'If.

Miss Talbot had never heard of such extraordinary conduct in her life. She wondered how two women would have conducted the negotiations. The question was too abstruse, so she gave it up and contented herself instead with accepting Daubeney's hearty request that they should inspect the yacht.

The *Blue-Bell* was an extremely smart little ship of 250 tons register, and an ordinary speed of twelve knots. Incidentally Miss Talbot discovered that the owner made the vessel his home. He was never happy away from her, and the *Blue-Bell* was known to every yachtsman from the Hebrides to the Golden Horn.

To eke out her coal supply she was fitted with sails, and Daubeney assured his fair visitor that the *Blue-Bell* could ride out a gale as comfortably and safely as any craft afloat. Altogether Miss Talbot congratulated herself on Fairholme's discovery, and she could not help hoping that their strange errand to Marseilles might eventuate in a Mediterranean chase.

When the tour of inspection had ended Daubeney suggested an excursion.

"I understand you have never been to Marseilles before, Miss Talbot. In that case what do you say if we run over and see the Château d'If—the place that Dumas made famous, you know."

"Is it far?" said Edith.

"Oh, not very, about a mile across the harbour. Monte Cristo swam the distance, you know, after his escape."

"Shall we go in the yacht?"

Daubeney bubbled with laughter.

"Well, not exactly, Miss Talbot. You cannot swing a ship of this size about so easily as all that, you know. I have another craft alongside that will suit our purpose."

He whistled to a tiny steam launch which Edith had not noticed before, and without further ado the party seated themselves. They sped rapidly down the harbour and out through the narrow entrance between the lighthouses.

No sooner did Edith behold the splendid panorama of rocky coast that incloses the great outer bay, with its blue waters studded with delightful little islands, through which the fishing boats and small steam tugs threaded their way towards different points on the coast, than she clapped her hands with schoolgirl delight.

"I had no idea," she cried, "that Marseilles was half so beautiful. Why, it is a wonderful place. I have always read about it being hot and dirty. It certainly is untidy, but to wash its citizens would take away all the romance, whilst as for the climate being hot, just imagine a day like this in the middle of November. Can you possibly think what the sensation would be if you were plunged into a London fog at this moment, Mr. Daubeney?".

"I have hardly ever seen one," he replied. "I take mighty good care to be far removed from my beloved country during the fog season."

She sighed. "What it is to be a man and to be able to roam about the world unfettered."

"It all depends upon the meaning of the word 'unfettered,'" said Daubeney. "Have you got any sisters, Miss Talbot?"

They all laughed at this inconsequent question. It was impossible to resist Daubeney's buoyant good nature, and Edith felt certain that in half an hour she would be calling him "Jimmy."

They sped across the waves towards the Château d'If, and finally drew up alongside its small landing-stage.

The island supplies an all-the-year-round resort for the townspeople. Every fine day a steamer runs at intervals to and fro between it and the inner harbour. The good folk of the south of France, whether Marseillais or visitors to the city, find a constant delight in taking the short marine excursion and wandering for half an hour about the rocky pathways and steep turrets of the famous prison, whilst they listen with silent awe to the words of the guide when he tells them how the Abbé died, and shows them the hole between the two walls excavated by Monte Cristo. So the English visitors found themselves in the midst of a number of laughing, light-hearted French sightseers.

They wandered round with the crowd until Edith looked at her watch.

"It is past twelve o'clock," she said. "Should we not be going back to the hotel to lunch? You will come with us, of course, Mr. Daubeney?"

"I am famished with expectation," answered the irrepressible Jimmy, "but before we go away you certainly ought to climb up on the leads and get the panoramic view of the harbour which the tower affords on a clear day. It is a sight to be remembered, I promise you."

So they made the ascent, Daubeney leading in his capacity of guide, though he was quite breathless when they reached the top of the steps.

Edith followed him, and then Fairholme.

"Good gracious," said the latter.

"What's the matter?" cried Edith.

Fairholme dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Look," he said, indicating with his eyes a distant corner.

Edith followed his glance, and instantly comprehended the cause of his startled exclamation. For in that quiet spot stood four men, whom she could not fail to recognise as Grosjean, Hussein ul Mulk, and the other two Turks, although, of course, she had never previously set eyes upon them.

She instantly understood they must continue to talk and act in the guise of ordinary tourists. In this respect the presence of Daubeney was invaluable, for he naturally could not guess the community of interest between his aristocratic friends and the motley group in the corner.

As soon as he regained his breath, Edith and he commenced a lively conversation, whilst Fairholme whispered a word of warning to Sir Hubert, who had now joined them.

It was well that the earl took this precaution, for in the course of their casual stroll round the tower they passed close to the Frenchman and his companions.

A small staircase led up to the interior of the turret, which, as already described, formed part of the angle that sheltered the group of men.

When Edith and the others strolled past the door they glanced inside and caught sight of a shabby-looking Frenchman, who had paused half way up the stairs, and was leaning eagerly forward through an embrasured loop-hole, obviously intent upon hearing every word uttered by the quartette beneath.

Fortunately Edith, who was nearest to the door, was completely shrouded from Grosjean's observation. Else that astute gentleman might have noticed her involuntary start of surprise. For the shabby-looking Frenchman was her brother.

The instant Talbot heard footsteps he naturally turned to see who it was that approached, and he also was amazed to find Edith's wondering eyes fixed upon him at a distance of only a few feet.

She nodded her head and placed a warning finger upon her lips. As it happened, Daubeney caught her in the act, and for the next few moments that gentleman's emotions were intense, not to say painful.

"Who would have thought it?" he muttered to himself. "A girl like her making secret signs to a dirty scoundrel of that sort. The beggar was good looking, of course; but what—well, I give it up. Poor old Fairholme! What funny creatures women are, to be sure!"

How much further this soliloquy might have proceeded he knew not, for Edith sharply interrupted his thoughts.

"You seem to be preoccupied, Mr Daubeney. What has happened?" she inquired.

"I—I—really don't know."

His distress was so unmistakable that her quick woman's wit divined the true cause.

"You saw me make signs to that Frenchman, didn't you?"

"Well—er—I—er——"

"Oh, yes, I understand. Of course you were surprised. But don't jump now, or say anything; he is my brother!"

"It is a mystery," she whispered, "a deep secret. We will tell you all about it at lunch."

(Another long instalment next week.)

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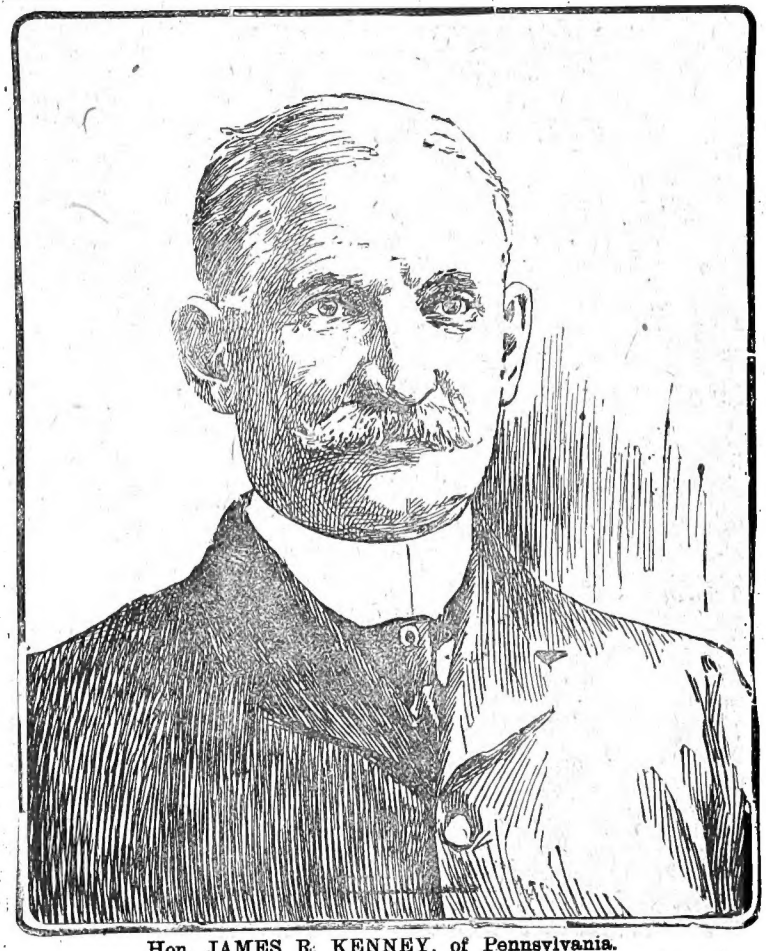

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IN CONFIDENCE

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

An Anonymous Admirer.

Cadfor has received an anonymous letter from a young lady who attends the same chapel. The letter states that the writer's friend has taken a great fancy to Cadfor, and wants to be introduced to him. It is suggested that he should attend certain debates held at the chapel after service. Cadfor asks me how he is to find out the identity of the writer, seeing that there are about thirty or forty people attending there.

* * * * *

Well, Cadfor, I do not suppose there are thirty or forty persons of the kind that would write you this letter. If you are sufficiently flattered by the fact that a certain young lady has taken a fancy to you, and would like to avail yourself of the opportunity of meeting her, I should attend the meeting, and carefully scrutinise the audience for two young ladies together who appear to be looking in your direction.

* * * * *

Unless you are exceptionally attractive in appearance, I should not imagine more than a certain number of them will be thus honouring you, and you should not have much difficulty in locating the anonymous writer. I have read the letter in question, and personally like the tone of it very much. She must be very much smitten with you indeed, seeing that she has had to be so very forward in making your acquaintance. I hope the attraction will prove mutual.

❦❦❦

Girls in the Colonies.

I am always pleased to hear from Colonial readers, and no small portion of my correspondence comes from the outlying parts of the Empire, particularly South Africa. Referring to my warning some time ago to girls who seek to go to Africa on the off chance of finding husbands, A. H. writes me from Cape Colony:

* * * * *

"It is a foolish idea. I have seen plenty of reasons why it is dangerous for unprotected females to travel in this country. You will do immense good by impressing on your readers the necessity of having a good situation before leaving for South Africa. Of course, one can find as good and honest men as you see at home out here, and there are many of them. We should be glad of more British lasses out here to keep us company. But it would be disastrous of them to come here just on the chance of getting a matrimonial prize."

* * * * *

Thanks, A. H., for your confirmation of my advice. By all means girls desirous of emigrating should see that they either have actual employment or good introductions before going to the Colonies. When they have, then there is every reason why they should go out to fill the places that must be open to British girls there, as everywhere else, in the hearts and homes of their fellow countrymen.

How Often Should They Meet?

"Ought a man to get tired of a girl through seeing her twice a week?" asks Helen. Well, what a half-hearted lover he must be if he does! The proper lover ought not to be tired of a girl at any time, whether waking or dreaming. If twice a week is too much for his devotion, I should recommend a girl to excuse him altogether.

* * * * *

But I do not wish to lay down the rule that a man should give up his whole time to his sweetheart. That would be bad for both of them, as the man in particular, if he is worthy of the name, should have some other interests in life besides his sweetheart, or he could never make the necessary headway in the world. Twice a week is quite a good average, however, and if a man thinks it is too often, he is no true lover.

❦❦❦

An Indian Suitor.

Violet (Oldham) has a complication to unfold to me. Some time ago she encountered a young Indian native, who paid her a great deal of attention. After a year or so, he met her again and seeks to renew the acquaintance. He has asked her to meet him in the evening. Do I advise her to accept the invitation?

* * * * *

You must know whether or not you liked the man when you first met him. If so, then there is no particular reason why an Indian should not make as faithful and good a suitor as a fellow-countryman. But, as you know, they are a race not at all above enjoying flirtation—in fact, experience proves them to be adepts at the pastime. If you have no feeling whatever for him of a tender nature I should advise you not to agree to meeting him in the way he suggests. Wait until he makes his intentions clearer.

❦❦❦

The Non-Lover Again.

So, Unreciprocative (why use such a long name?), you are twenty-six, and have never yet had any feelings towards the opposite sex (feminine) save those of a platonic nature. Do I think it unnatural and unusual?

* * * * *

No, not at all. We cannot all be amorous, and it is quite as well that a select few keep their heads cool, and do not rush into complications. Evidently you have not as yet met the right sort of woman, perhaps because you have been too little in their company.

* * * * *

I advise you to cease worrying about your emotions at all, making the best you can out of the platonic relations you speak of. After all, those friendships are often the most lasting, and you are to be congratulated on being able to enjoy them. If you are constructed as are most human beings, you will in course of time meet the one best suited to you, but do not attempt to hurry the work of "the destiny which shapes our ends."

❦❦❦

An Affair of Names.

R. H. is in a "pickle." He knows a girl, and has been calling her by her Christian name. He then met her sister, whom he supposed to be the elder of the two, and addressed her as "Miss Brown," going so far as to send Christmas cards so addressed. Now he has discovered that his more intimate friend is the elder. How is he to compromise matters now when meeting the two?

* * * * *

I think you had better ask the other girl's permission to call her by her Christian name, prefixing "Miss." There is no need for you to call your original friend "Miss Brown" when you have once progressed so far as to use her Christian name. That would be reaction, a thing quite undesirable in affairs of the heart.

Cynthia

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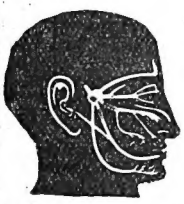

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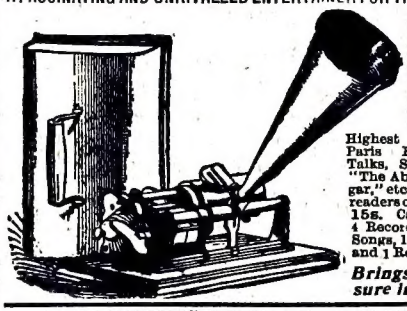

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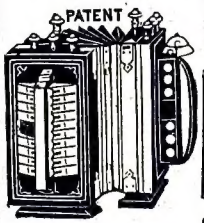

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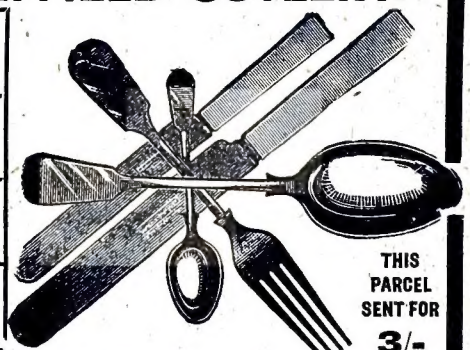

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